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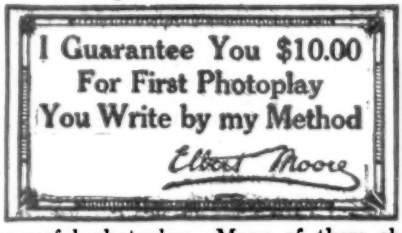

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(Former Scenario Editor)
Box 772BC, Chicago

The Black Cat

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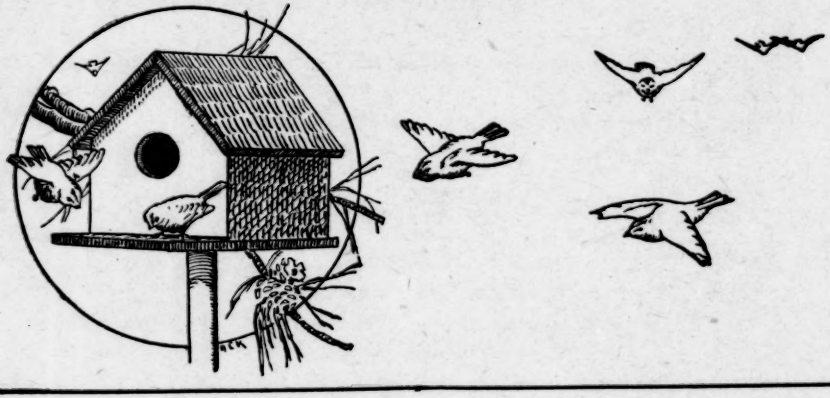

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The Black Cat

The Old Law

BY EDWIN CARLILE LITSEY

Kipling says, "The female of the species is more deadly than the male." This story, by a Kentuckian, of his own country and its mountain people is a dramatic incident of Kipling's indictment of Adam's rib.

IT was a night in late summer, and the full moon had just risen above the crest of Old Boss, the highest peak in the Turkeyfoot range. Near the base of this towering, verdure-covered mass of earth and limestone, on a small, out-jutting plateau, was a cabin. Before the cabin, and a little to one side, where a huge iron pot hung by a rusty chain to its tripod of oaken staves, stood a man and a woman. More of a girl, she was, in truth, though life in the open and healthful toil had already brought her straight young form to the semblance of maturity. Erect as a pine she stood and faced the slouching, but powerful figure before her.

"I tol' yo' not to come here no mo'," she said, her voice a rich contralto, which vibrated subtly.

"I didn't git no sich word frum yo', Suella," answered the man, taking off his hat and drawing his sleeve across his forehead.

He spoke huskily and in a low monotone.

The girl gave an impatient gesture and tossed her head disdainfully.

"Don't go to split'n' ha'rs, Quint! Yo' knowed I tol' yo' not to come no mo' less'n' pap 'n' mam' 'n' th' kids 's here, too."

"How 's I'm to know when th' folks 's here?" he retorted.

"I 'low yo' seen 'em leave, ur yo' wouldn't 'a' come!" was the bold reply. "I don't 'tend fur hit to git 'broad that I'm keep'n' comp'ny 'ith you, 'n' th' bes' thing fur us both is fur you to cl'ar out."

She changed her position slightly with this speech and came full into the moonlight. It was an unlucky movement. Her face and bust sprang into clearest view and the love-mad mountaineer caught his breath with a hissing sound, clenched and unclenched his hands, then said:

"Why don' yo' want 'o keep comp'ny 'ith me?"

He thrust his hair-covered face forward as he spoke, and the girl saw the glint of his eyes.

Suella Porn was not frightened, although she was in a desolate spot with a determined man whom she hated. She did not quail now; neither did she reply. She was thinking

of what the next few minutes would bring.

"Why?" repeated Quint Dade, advancing a step and grasping one of the stakes of the tripod.

"Yo' know why!" answered Suella, steadily, but a creepy feeling ran down her spine when she saw that the man's gaze had shifted to her throat and the few inches of bared bosom which her light frock disclosed. He was watching her as she had seen a dog watch a treed rabbit.

"Tell me! Say th' words!" he insisted, a deep, satisfying chuckle rattling in his chest. "Ef yo' want a *man,* he's here! They ain't another 'n' on Turkeyfoot c'n lif' a dead beef, 'n' I've dared 'em to wras'le 'ith me tel I'm tired!"

Scorn leaped to the girl's eyes and swift words to her tongue.

"Yo' know why, but I'm not 'shamed nur skeered to tell yo' ag'in! I love Tom Medrow, ez you 'n' the hull neighborhood knows!"

The declaration must have been true, for her olive cheeks turned darker as she hotly voiced her feelings, and her bosom began to rise and fall tumultuously.

Something set the hanging pot to swinging gently and the chain to creaking, although the night was still. Quint suddenly moved aside from the tripod and crushed his hat before him with both hands.

A shadow, low to the ground, moved swiftly from the cabin toward the trail leading to the level below. Suella saw it, snapped her fingers and whistled. The dog turned and came bounding forward. He was only a small coon dog, but he was faithful and muscular. His mistress bent and patted his head. When she stood upright again, the cur reared and put his paws upon her knee, licking her hand. She silently toyed with his muzzle, detaining him thus.

Dade spoke vindictively:

"Tom's lef' yo'!"

The reply was instant and spirited:

"Yo' know yo're lyin'!"

The man shifted uneasily, let one hand drop to the butt of a revolver on his hip and glared at the dog.

"Then why 'n't he come back, ef he loves yo' so tur'ble hard?"

"That's none o' yo' business, but he is com'n' back putty soon."

"Yo' shore o' that?" questioned Dade, drawing a few steps nearer and laughing in a reckless way.

There was something in his manner which sent a shiver of fear to the girl's heart. Not for herself, but for her absent lover. Her hand became passive in the jaws of the mouthing dog.

"S'pose he don' come," pursued her companion darkly. "'Twouldn't do fur a mort'l fine look'n' gel lak you to be a' ol' maid. How 'bout me fur secon' choice? I'd be will'n' to stan' that, Suella, to git yo'!"

The girl looked at him and shivered—the result of disgust and horror. Then she spoke, in merciless, cutting tones.

"He *will* come, Quint Dade, less'n you do some'n' to keep 'im frum it. 'N' yo' want 'o lis'n to me now. Ef yo' lay 'way th' road fur Tom, 'n' kill 'im, then I'll kill you 's sho 's God made geese! 'N' I wouldn't marry *you'* ef I lived to be 's ol' 's Granny Singleberry! I wouldn't

tech yo' fur noth'n'! I'd ruther tech a *hawg!*"

It may have been because of her stinging, contemptuous words, or it may have been that he wilfully let go all restraint then, but the next moment she was struggling in his arms.

While partly suspecting this move, it came with such swiftness that Suella was thrown into a temporary panic. But courage and anger leaped up an instant later and she fought. She was all alive. There were no dead tissues in her beautiful round body; no atrophying cells where her rich blood lingered on its ceaseless journey. Muscular she was and sinuously sinewy.

Dade's quick embrace had pinioned one of her arms, but her right hand was free, and with hasty vigor, she struck again and again the black-bearded visage, ever attempting to thrust against her face. His arm was around her, holding her to him with grim power, but from the waist up, she strained back and away, her face disfigured with rage. For a moment he sought to parry her blows, then he roughly flung his arm back of her neck and forced her lips to his. It was the caress of a mad animal. To Suella's nostrils came the fumes of whiskey, and as she wrenched her mouth aside, she knew it was bleeding, for a salt tang was on her tongue.

The cur was dashing about the two, barking and undecided. The struggling girl knew she must have help.

"Tip! Tip!" she called. "Here, take 'im!"

This was all the coon dog needed, for his life had been a succession of battles, though waged mainly with four-footed denizens of the wood. He leaped to the attack with a snarl of delight, and his long white teeth closed on the man's calf.

Sudden, sharp pain is a powerful agent. Quint turned his head with a curse and kicked viciously, unconsciously slacking his hold on the girl. Now, with a sinking, squirming movement, she was free, leaving a portion of her clothing in Dade's futile grip. She ran. She gained a moment or two as the man tarried to shake off the weight which still clung to his leg. But the cur did not know how to let go. He allowed himself to be threshed back and forth over the ground, but his teeth did not unclamp. He only snarled and hung on.

Then there was a pistol shot, and Dade, doubly infuriated, took up the chase.

Suella, near the bottom of the incline which led down from the plateau, looked back as she ran. The report of the gun indicated plainly to her what had happened. Now she saw the man appear at the head of the path, forty or fifty yards away. The moonlight was almost brilliant, and the trees did not grow densely enough to cast a continuous shadow. He was starting down. Suella ran lightly and listened, for directly in front of her pursuer a big beech had thrust one of its gnarled roots out across the road. It had long been an obstruction, and late that afternoon her father had taken a pick and loosened the dirt from around it, preparatory to chopping it away the following morning. As it stood that moment it formed a trap for one not observant.

It caught Quint Dade. Suella heard his crashing fall and explosive oaths, then lifting her dress so as not to trip, she flew.

Though she could not oppose the man successfully in strength, she was fleet as a hound and could run without tiring. This was a portion of her birthright and it served her well that hour.

Her route lay along the east bank of Little Minnow Creek, where a passage had been cut by log rollers to get their product out to the main road. It was not smooth, neither was it free from low bushes and stumps, but the girl knew every foot of the ground and she never stumbled.

The man who had attacked and insulted her was now in hot pursuit. But she felt no apprehensions. He would never catch her. In a short time, she could hear his footsteps no longer. Still she ran with unabated speed, and in less than thirty minutes, safely reached the shack where her folks had gone to spend a neighborly hour. There she told her story, and Nosey George, her gaunt and implacable sire, calmly voiced his determination.

Suella put her hand upon his shoulder, and her big bright eyes held a strange light.

"I've got another idy, pap," she said; "you jes' wait!"

The next day, soon after dinner, Suella decided to go down to the creek and fish. Little Minnow broadened to a hole within hailing distance of her home and she had no fear that she would be disturbed. Her hurt mouth still pained her, although a poultice of simples which her mother applied over night had reduced the inflammation somewhat, and allayed the ache in a measure. But as she started down the path with pole and line, her spirit was seething in revolt at the indignity she had suffered. Tempestuous in her nature, steadfast in her loves and inexorable in her hates, she could not rest until this humiliation had been atoned for. And the creed which she nursed in her white bosom admitted but one expiation: death!

Making herself comfortable among the twining roots of a century-old sycamore whose top had leaned farther and farther as the persistent water strove with her soil about its base, the girl drew a fishing-worm over her hook, spat on the bait, and cast her line. Then she quickly realized that it was solitude she was seeking, and not sport, for when a frisky fish began to make her cork stopper dance a jig and finally disappear in a slanting dive, she did not draw up.

With frowning brows and stormy eyes she sat cross-legged, her breathing uneven, as her mind recounted the previous night's adventure. How she hated Quint Dade!—the big, black-whiskered, ugly devil! Her hand would have been steady to drive a knife into him or pull a trigger against him. He repulsed her as some hairy animal would. From the moment he first saw her he wanted her. Can a man hide that feeling from a woman? Suella had known it from the beginning and her initial aversion had grown to loathing as he grinningly pressed his attentions upon her. Of late he had grown moody and his eyes held a cunning look. The

day came when he took her hand and tried to caress her. That was when she told him not to come any more when she was alone.

He knew she and Tom Medrow were "sett'n' up," because it was common gossip. But he persevered, and none of the men folk thereabout blamed him, for Nosey George's oldest daughter made a fellow catch his breath just to look at her.

Four months before, Tom had gone to Virginia. He had nothing and he was ambitious for his sweetheart. Tales had filtered into Turkeyfoot of the quick money a strong man could make at the mines, and after repeated consultations, both agreed that Tom should go and investigate. He had never written for the simple reason that he couldn't write, but now and again he had found a way to send word that he was doing well. The last messenger stated that he was coming home; would follow in a few days.

From reviewing the horrible episode which had so enraged her, Suella's mind drifted to the other extreme and she began to think of Tom. He was big, too, but what pretty brown, twinkling eyes he had, and his face was smooth and hard, because Tom had used a razor. His clothing was rough, it is true, but how tender he was with her! He never cussed and got drunk like other men, and he had never killed but one person. How soft his voice became when he talked to her, and how gently he would kiss her! A little ripple of feeling quivered along her shoulders at the thought; her lids closed and she smiled.

Arrows of pain shot through her bruised lips, and in a flash her face grew stern and her eyes fired.

It was not a noise which caused her to look around and see the man she loved standing on the bank above her. We advanced mortals might call it telepathy, but Suella would have said she felt him there.

As her pole dropped and she cried out in her delight, the brawny young fellow was by her side, kneeling and drawing her close to him. He kissed her black hair, her forehead, her nose —then he saw! With a sort of gasp, he sank upon his thigh, and the look of fury which gathered on his tanned face made the girl almost afraid. She put out one hand and burrowed her fingers under the collar of his loose blue shirt, letting them lie there against his neck. It was one of her old caresses.

"Tom!" she breathed; "oh, Tom!"

The veins in his temples swelled; he swallowed with a choking noise, drew a deep breath and said very low:

"Who done it, Suella—him?"

Quickly the reaction came to the girl. Here was her revenge as she had planned it. Struggling up within her now was a double joy: that of his presence, and the certainty that he would right her burning wrong.

She drew aside and made room for him in the depression where she had been sitting, and presently, with his arms holding her tightly to him, she hung her head and told the story.

Again and again she felt rigors run through his frame, and occasionally a low, wordless exclamation would interrupt her. When she was done she

did not lift her face, but waited for what he would say.

For many moments, Tom was speechless, and Suella was beginning to wonder, when he drew her head to his breast and spoke.

"Little gel, I've got a qu'r story to tell yo'."

How different his voice was! How unlike this was from what she had expected and longed to hear!

She forcibly freed her head from his detaining hand and turned about in his embrace to gaze at him. Could this be Tom Medrow? Her first alarmed glance showed her that his anger, while not gone, was under control, and a troubled expression had settled upon his countenance. She had listened for hot, reassuring words of a speedy vengeance; she had heard instead, a softly-spoken sentence utterly away from the subject. And now he seemed undecided as to his course!

"Tom!" she cried; "air yo' crazy? Why 'n't yo' say yo'll shoot 'im lak a dawg? Why 'n't yo' tell me th' sun won't go down on 'im liv'n'? Yo' want 'o do it! I seen it in yo' eyes th' minute yo' knowed! Yo're not 'fraid. Ef I thought you 's 'fraid, I'd—I'd spit in yo' face! But yo' ain't! Whut's th' matter? Don' yo' love me? Ain't I wuth a man's life whut's hurt me? Air yo' gunta let *this* go by, Tom, 'n' not lif' yo' han'?"

She pointed to her swollen lips, mutilated by three or four purple indentations.

He sat staring at her with anguished face, his breath labored and short.

"Yo' know I love yo', gel," he said, leaning toward her with contracted eyelids; "but yo' don't know how much. Yo'—yo' c'd almos' make me do whut I knowed 's wrong! Will yo' lis'n to me fus'? Will yo' lis'n to whut I got to say? Then mebbe yo' won't as' me to kill Quint Dade!"

Suella's chin dropped in sheer amazement as she heard and she stared at her lover in bewildered silence. Had something happened to his mind while he was away, to make him act so queerly? His words were those of a coward, but Tom Medrow had never feared anything living before. Had his sojourn in a different part of the country taken all his manhood from him?

The girl sighed and turned her head away without speaking.

Then Tom began to talk. In simple words he told her of his life at the mines and of the good pay he received. Then he spoke of dropping by his own home on his way to see her, and of the joy in that household because Janey, his littlest sister, had been saved the day before from the attack of a mad dog. She was playing in the big road when the animal came upon her with foaming mouth. Too frightened to run, she would have been bitten had not a distant marksman's aim proved true. It was Quint Dade's gun which had saved the life of baby Janey, the pet of the family.

Suella heard him through, but the smoldering fire in her black eyes was not dimmed.

"Hit mought 'a' gone on 'bout its business 'n' not bothered th' gel," she argued. "Mad dogs ain't 's tur'ble 's people make out."

Tom looked at her with a dull mis-

ery in his eyes. "Sho'ly yo' ain't want'n' me to kill Quint now?" he asked.

She regarded him curiously, as though a stranger had suddenly appeared at her side.

"Yo' ain't th' man I loved fo' months ago," she then said, coldly. "Yo're somebody else. Th' man 't gits me fur a woman 's got to be able 'n' will'n' to take keer o' me. I b'lieve yo'd let Quint Dade slap 'n' beat me right fo' yo' eyes 'n' yo' wouldn't raise a finger! Whut any woman wants fus' o' all is a *man!*"

She flung the fishing pole from her lap and got to her feet with lithe, swift motions. Tom was up almost as quickly as she.

"I don't know noth'n' 'bout this here yarn yo' come bring'n'," she went on. "Turkeyfoot's be'n here a long time, 'n' we-uns ain't never let a' en'my go yit. You know th' old law, 'n' hit's a good 'n'. Fight back 'n' fight hard! That's whut I 's raised on 'n' whut I'm useter, 'n' I ain't got no patience 'ith a mealy-mouthed man! Goodbye, Tom. I'd ruther have Quint Dade 'n' you!"

With this bitter taunt, she turned and began to clamber over the tree's gray, knotted roots.

Medrow leaped after her and his hand closed on her arm.

"Fur God's sake, wait a minute, Suella!" he pleaded, his voice trembling.

She turned with a lofty look of exasperation, but the man paid no heed. His cheeks now were the color of the new bark on the trunk of the sycamore—blue-white.

"Don't! Don't leave me this away!" he said, striving to draw her toward him in his earnestness, but she remained in her tracks. "Don't go 'way, gel! Yo've said hard things to me, but it's 'cause yo' don't onderstan', 'n' I don't hol' 'em ag'in yo'! I'm a man yit, Suella, but I love that little sister o' mine! Ef yo' jes' knowed how much—wait! wait!" The girl had tried all at once to free her arm. "I won't talk 'bout that no mo' ef yo'll jes' come back! I can't let yo' go, gel; my God! I can't let yo' go!"

He bowed his head and his strong frame shook.

Suella Porn, standing somewhat above, gazed down at him with softened face and eyes which suddenly had grown musing. That moment she knew her power. But she did not answer him.

When he raised his head at last, her features were again immobile.

"Whut yo' want me to do, Suella?" he asked, but his voice was dead. The question came in a ghostly undertone.

"Noth'n'," she answered, a little wearily, her eyes over his head.

"Don't! Don't plague me that away! Tell me ag'in whut yo' want me to do!"

"Hit's not fur me to want yo' to do it; hit's fur yo'seff to want yo'seff to do it. Lemme loose, now; I mus' go."

She twisted her arm, and his fingers fell away.

For a moment Medrow clapped his palms to his temples and buried his fingers in his hair.

"Gimme a little while!" he cried, desperately. "Lemme think. I can't see 's I c'n live 'ithout yo! Ever' day ez I worked I thought uv how 'twuz

fur you. Jes' a day 'r two, now, to steddy 'bout it! I wush I'd never gone to th' mines! Tell me I c'n come to see yo'—ever' day!"

A swift change swept over the girl. She tried to smile, grimaced with the pain of the effort, then put one hand out and laid it along Tom's cheek.

"Yes, yo' c'n come 'n' see me. But yo' mus' promise me one thing—allus tote yo' rifle-gun. Mebbe yo're right, 'n' yo' know I'm tur'ble quick-tongued. But don't furgit—th' gun, allus!"

Before he could recover from his joyful surprise, she had leaped up the bank and was running toward the shack near the base of Old Boss.

Day after day now, Tom came to the cabin on the little plateau. He had brought money back with him, most of it in five and ten dollar gold pieces, and he displayed it proudly for Suella's admiration. Jewelry trinkets, too, he had; pinchbeck stuff which made a great glitter for a small outlay, but to the mountain girl's gaze it stood for riches and ease. She accepted his offerings but without enthusiasm.

They took long walks. A spirit of unrest seemed to have seized upon Suella, and when Medrow called in the day she usually led him off on some far tramp. Heeding her request, Tom always carried his repeater with him, though he laughed at her for insisting upon this and told her there could be no danger to either of them.

One afternoon they strolled along the main highway of that section for several miles. Coming to where the road followed a dry creek bed for a considerable distance, they halted. Jagged spurs and beetling cliffs uprose on every hand. To one side, some twenty feet up a rugged slope, a cluster of black-eyed Susans nodded in a barely perceptible breeze, behind a natural stone breastwork. The flowers caught the girl's eye and in an instant her face brightened.

"Look, Tom!" she said! "I want 'em!"

She grasped his shoulder and pointed.

Suella had been moody that day, and at this evidence of interest a glad smile leaped to the man's face.

"They're your'n, chil'," he answered, and bounded up the slope.

As he stooped to pick them, he heard her breath over his shoulder.

"Whut—" he began, the flowers dangling in his fingers.

"I wanted to res' a while," she broke in, "'n' this is a good hide-away place."

She sank to the ground as she spoke, and taking up her bonnet, began to fan herself. The earth lifted a little where she reclined, and she could see over the outcropping stone far down the creek road.

Medrow placed his rifle against the stone and stretched out at her feet. He silently put the black-eyed Susans in her lap and stared up at her in a pitifully beseeching way.

"Ever'thing ain't straight yet, is it, gel?" he asked, his voice troubled.

She glanced down the stream's course and silently shook her head.

"Yo' ain't th' same sweetheart I went 'way to make money fur, so 's yo' c'd live easy," he continued. "Yo'

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 50]

The Eternal Feminine

BY HAPSBURG LIEBE

Cupid softens a sheriff's heart, and he fails in a task he "kissed the bible" to perform. But it was all unnecessary because of a peddler.

THE stranger in San Macati always wonders why Cactus county has pinned its sheriff's star on Stapleton Atchley. Ordinarily, Stape is so lazy that they have to tell him the house is on fire to get him out o' bed of a mornin', and so slow in his speech that more'n one man has took him to be deaf and dumb. The secret o' the thing lays in Stape's queer and unfailin' ability to bring back anything he goes after.

Now there was Baby Bill, the bad man. He was a giltedge, hardwearin' and dependable pocket edition de luxe formed o' what you might call a composite edition o' all the outlaws the golden West has ever seen—barrin' their good qualities. He'd named himself Baby Bill. The name suited his looks first rate, for the outside o' him was sure all peaches-and-cream. But the inside o' him was pure and unadulterated rattlesnake pizen.

Of course a woman bobbed up in the case, just to make it interestin' and to prove once more that the more educated womankind becomes, the more primitive it is. But I guess she was really only a girl. She was the most feminine female I've ever seen. She wasn't a dark-eyed spitfire. She was a plump little party with fine blue eyes and copperish hair and a worried-mother expression that only made her cactus-flower beauty more appealin' and her manner as charmin' as spifflicated sin. She was a animated Brittanica. She could tell you how many suns Saturn had and how many bones was in the human carcass; she knowed who was the first emperor o' Japan and who discovered the telegraph; she knowed why whiskey made a man drunk and how many was killed in the Crimean War.

She steps from the train one mornin', shakes the wrinkles out of her blue skirts, and begins to size up the bunch o' cowboys loafers, like she's expectin' to find somebody she knows. The boys all gets for their hats and bows awkward and turns red. Then Sheriff Stape Atchley walks out o' the telegraph office with a piece o' yeller paper in his hands.

"Boys," he drawls, not seein' the female member of his audience, "Baby Bill is headed this way from Santa Barb'. He killed an old man there for his money. If you see him, don't give him a chance. If you do, he'll get you."

Stape crumples the telegram and puts it in his pocket. The little party in the blue dress turns white and stares at Stape. Then Stape sees her, and takes off his Stetson.

"Good morning, ma'am," says he.

And he blushes worse'n any o' the punchers had done.

The girl looks at the sheriff's tin star for a second, takes the sheriff by one arm, and decamps with him like she just dares him not to come along.

"See here, Mr. Sheriff," she says, when they're out o' earshot o' the cowmen, "this Baby Bill fellow is my sweetheart!"

"Your sweetheart!" says Stape.

"Yes," the girl goes on, "he is, and I love him more than anything. And you're not going to kill him, either—do you understand that?"

"I—I ain't!" says Stape, turnin' still redder.

"No," says the girl, like she sure means it. And then she adds, and with somethin' o' the weight we may imagine is used in the buildin' of kingdoms, "I'm from New York."

"New York!" repeats Stape, like an echo.

"Yes; and so is Willie Cartwright," says the girl.

Stape fumbles with his hat for a few seconds. "So his real name is Willie Cartwright, is it, Miss? We call him Baby Bill out here, which name he invented himself."

"Don't call me 'Miss,'" protests the little party in blue. "It sounds hayseedish. Call me Miss McBride—my name is Alice McBride. Yes, Willie Cartwright is his real, sure-enough name. He was my sweetheart back in old Manhat, and I turned him down for lack of good judgment. He said life wasn't anything to him without me, and that he'd come out here, turn outlaw, and get killed as soon as possible. I didn't think he'd do it, but he did. That is, he turned outlaw. He worked in a shootin' gallery, where he learned to shoot a gnat in the eye without breakin' a lash. I worked in a department store. See? I'm goin' to let people think I'm out here for my health. But the minute I find Willie, I'm goin' to sneak him back to New York. And if you find him first you bring him to me."

Now that's what she handed Stapleton Atchley, the sheriff of Cactus County!

"You don't understand, Miss—Miss McBride," stammers Stape. "The young man has committed a number o' crimes, and the laws o' the United States requires a penalty for such doin's."

"That's all right about the laws o' the United States," replies the little party in blue. "If you find Willie first, you bring him to me. Please have my baggage sent over to the hotel, Mr. Sheriff—here's the checks. Remember, if you find Willie first, you're to bring him to me."

Well, the girl rides around hossback a good deal, and keeps her eyes open at all times, but she don't seem to be able to get a line on her Willie. And Stape, seein' her every day, and bein' a young man, soon finds himself in love with her so hard that he talks about her in his sleep. Y' understand, Stape had never had that there love disease before, and it hit him like yeller fever.

Then, in the afternoon, an old sheep herder rides in, enters Stape's little office, and tells Stape that if he'll go out to the head o' Mesquit Creek that night, which is out in the edge o' the big hills, he'll find the kid outlaw lyin' sleepin' like a kitten in an old

'dobe hut. The herder describes the little bad man so fully that Stape believes it's the right one—and it was.

So Stape promises to let the old feller in on the reward, and the visitor departs.

When the herder has gone, Stape leans back in his homemade office chair and begins to wrastle with himself. He loved Alice McBride as he knowed he'd never love anybody else on earth. If he caught or killed Baby Bill, he'd break Alice's heart. Of course, Baby Bill bein' out o' the way would give him a clear sweep at Alice's affections; but Stape, bein' a notably square man, didn't like that road to success. And if Stape didn't do all in his power to bring the little bad man to justice, he wouldn't be doin' what he'd kissed the Bible to the law he'd do.

Into the middle o' his sea o' troubles walks Alice herself. She tells Stape to keep his seat, and sits down on an empty powdercan.

"Is there any news?" she says.

"News?" repeats Stape, absent like. He didn't want to tell her that her Willie Cartwright is right then as good as arrested, tried and hung by the neck until dead.

"News—news—yes," says Alice, with her two blue eyes lookin' holler and wistful.

Stape seen that it had come; that it was as inevitable as death, taxes, and chickenpox.

"Yes, Alice," he says, very slow, with his gaze on his boots, "there's news. I've located Baby Bill. I'm goin' out tonight to take him while he's sleepin'. That way I won't have to kill him."

He meant his latter sentence to be sort o' palliative. But it wasn't. Alice goes white and seems to be about to tumble off the powdercan.

"Stape," says she, "you might as well kill him as to arrest him. He's got murder against him, and if yo' arrest him he'll hang sure. Stape, he's just a boy. If he had a chance now, I'm sure he'd—he'd reform. There may have been circumstances about the killin's that you and me can't understand. Stape, for my sake, give him another chance! Let's go out there, you and me, and—and arrange it some way. I could dress him up in one o' my dresses, and put a shawl over his head, and sneak him out o' the country as a girl. He's no bigger than me, Stape. Stape, please—oh, please—"

Maybe she realized, all of a sudden, how hard it would be for a sworn officer o' the law to do what she asked, for she broke off talkin' and went to sobbin' pitiful like. Stape went to his feet, his sleepy eyes shinin' bright and his face full o' pain.

Alice looks up. "Stape," she says, "you love me. I know it. In the last four days you haven't made a move, or looked a look, or said a word, that didn't tell me plain that you love me. Now don't you, Stape?"

"More'n anything in the world," answers the sheriff. "But I can't do what you ask—I can't do that, even for you, Alice."

Alice goes to her feet, too. She steps to Stape, reaches up and puts her arms around his neck. Stape trembles all over.

"Look here," she says—"if you'll help me get Willie out o' the country

and started safely for New York, I'll marry you! I don't love you, but after a while I would. And I'd be true to you, and live only for you. Now you've got your choice, Stape: break your little oath o' office, which was made when you couldn't foresee this—or break my heart, and Willie's mother's heart, and your own heart, and send Willie to his death at the end of a rope. And poor Willie is only a boy! Now take your choice, Stape."

"But Willie—"

Alice McBride draws Stape's head down and interrupts him by a kiss square on the mouth.

"Oh, please!" she begs. "You see, when Willie understands what I've done for his sake—and I'll write to him as soon as he gets back home—he'll be bound in honor to live a good life because o' my sacrifice. Don't you see, Stape? Please, Stape, do this for me—and for yourself, and Willie's mother—she hasn't any other children but Willie, and she loves Willie so much. Won't you, Stape?"

She draws his head down again and kisses him again on the mouth. Stape's senses was whirlin'. He was in Heaven, and it was a big job even for an oath o' office to do—to drag him back to this troublous sphere we call the earth. Then he catches the girl clear o' the floor, and hugs her tight against the tin star on his breast; and she squeezes his neck again with her arms.

"By—— I'll do it!" says Stape, in a voice so small that Alice barely hears it.

"Oh, you blessed thing!" cries Alice, jubilant like.

It was a fine clear night, and there was a full moon. Stape and Alice had took moonlight hossback rides before and there was no suspicion o' their mission when they rode out o' San Macati together, that night.

And as they rode, Stape would take up Alice's nearest hand now and then, and kiss it—like a man tastin' o' fruits that hung over heaven's fence to his reach. And Alice would smile and smile and smile, and the bright moonlight made her beauty like spiked wine to the big sheriff of Cactus County. If ever there was a man in this vale of tears turned upside down, inside out, and end for end, by that there love disease, it was that good-hearted, lazy, slow-goin', Stapleton Atchley.

Finally Stape draws rein and points to the entrance of a valley walled in by steep and barren and rocky hillsides, which lays before the two like some golden wonderland.

"Up this valley, about a quarter of a mile," says he, "is the old 'dobe hut the sheep man told me about. I think I'd better leave you here with the hosses—"

"But I want to see Willie myself—just this one time more," interrupts Alice.

"But, Alice," says the sheriff, "there's a big chance that this Baby Bill—that is, Willie Cartwright—may do some shootin' before he finds out that I'm a peace emissary; so you'll have to stay here until I call you."

"If—if there's no other way," says Alice, resigned like.

Stape kisses her, gives her his hoss's rein to hold, dismounts, and be-

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The Alligator Test

BY HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY

A valuable patent plan is stolen. A far-seeing employer puts the case in the hands of a well-known magic man to find the thief among his clerks.

A FUSSY old gentleman, with gray side-whiskers and a silk hat, hopped from the first of two taxies that had drawn up before 769 Chestnut Street. He was followed by four young men, while from the other taxi emerged four more, two of them elderly men.

The old gentleman paid and dismissed the drivers of the taxies, and then, brandishing his gold-headed cane excitedly, led the way up the steps of the house, closely followed by the others, who were, judging from their expressions, much puzzled by these proceedings.

The leader pressed the electric door button, a bell tinkled faintly from within, and almost instantly the door swung open, disclosing a long narrow hall, quite bare of furniture or human beings.

"Step right in, gentlemen," said a sepulchral voice, apparently coming out of the air in front of them. "Take the second door to the right."

The eight followers of the old man gasped at this ghostly greeting and drew back. Had they been in the room of the second door to the right, at the instant their leader had pressed the button, they would have observed a man there, suddenly lean forward from the armchair in which he sat, reach into the empty fireplace and withdraw a telephone transmitter concealed therein and attached to a long cord. With the same movement, he touched a button, whereupon the outer door swung open and through the transmitter, he invited his visitors to enter, instantly returning it to its place of concealment so that when the old gentleman and his followers entered the room, the man was leaning back quietly in the chair with an open magazine on his knees.

"Ha, good morning, Mr. Wheeler!" he exclaimed cordially. "You are right on time, I see!"

"I am, sir. I am always punctual in my engagements, sir," returned the old gentleman pompously. "As soon as I reached the office this morning, I bustled the boys into taxies and hurried right up. They don't know why they are here yet."

He turned to his companions, waved his cane in the air, and announced: "Boys, this gentleman is the celebrated medium, the Great Mystero. He is going to give us a demonstration of his marvelous powers this morning, and I am sure you will find it interesting to witness."

This information seemed to have a startling effect on the others.

"Er—isn't this rather unusual, Mr. Wheeler?" coughed one of the elderly

men deprecatingly. "Er—business hours, you know, and the office is deserted."

"Don't worry about that, Erb," returned Mr. Wheeler crisply. "I am running the office, and if I choose to entertain you fellows during business hours, why, that is my affair. You may learn something interesting before we are through."

"I'd be interested to know right now who it was that opened that door," remarked one of the younger men. "There wasn't any one in the hall."

"It was my spirit butler, James," Mystero informed him gravely. "He is always on duty at the door, but is quite invisible to mortal eyes."

Several of his listeners snorted derisively at this information, whereupon, Mr. Wheeler glared indignantly and turned apologetically to the medium.

"Don't mind what they say," he said. "They're ignorant, that's all. Now, let's get this thing over with, without further delay."

"Very well, Mr. Wheeler," acceded Mystero cheerfully. "Gentlemen, please be seated," he motioned toward a row of chairs arranged against the wall at one end of the room and evidently placed there for this occasion.

The seeker after occult entertainment, and his eight followers, seated themselves obediently, with expressions that ran the gamut from extreme disgust to the liveliest interest. Mr. Wheeler was a strict business man and a stickler for rules and office discipline, and this conduct on his part passed the comprehension of his employees and aroused grave doubts in the minds of several as to his sanity.

They faced the length of the room, at the other end of which stood a small cabinet of black cloth, about four feet square by six high. Beside this was placed a small stand, on which rested, what appeared to be, a large jardiniere. Mystero placed himself before them and scanned the face of each sitter critically for some seconds before he began.

"Gentlemen," he said finally, "your employer, Mr. Wheeler, called here last night to consult me on a matter of great importance. As you probably know, Mr. Wheeler has lost some valuable papers, namely, the plans and specifications of the late Professor Eldred's 'All-Element Vehicle,' a conveyance designated to navigate the air, the land, the sea and under the sea with equal facility."

This information seemed to create a sensation among the sitters, several of whom glanced quickly at Mr. Wheeler with ejaculations of surprise.

"As you all know," continued Mystero, without heeding the interruption, "Professor Eldred died shortly after completing this invention and before application for patent could be made; so the plans stolen were the only ones in existence. Mr. Wheeler, who holds a manufacturer's interest in the invention, intended putting the vehicle on the market as quickly as possible, but owing to the demise of Professor Eldred there has been some delay in making application for patent.

"Mr. Wheeler placed the papers in the vault at his office for safe keeping three days ago. Yesterday, when

he went for them, they were missing. Mr. Wheeler is greatly disturbed over this, as these papers are the sole records of an invention which, if lost, will entail the loss of many thousands of dollars to his firm and Professor Eldred's heirs, besides being a loss of an invaluable invention to the world in general.

"Mr. Wheeler has appealed to me to restore those papers. Through my suggestion he has brought you here this morning to hold a sitting. He is loath to suspect any of his employees, but I have pointed out to him that you all have access to the vault, and that it is probable that all of you knew something about the invention. I believe—Mr. Wheeler's assurances to the contrary—that those papers were stolen, and I believe the thief is in this room and I purpose to find him before you leave!"

Several of the sitters rose to their feet with indignant exclamations, while the others gazed blankly at each other and at their employer.

"This is a positive insult!" exclaimed one of the men angrily. "Mr. Wheeler, I have been in your employ for—"

"Just a moment," interposed Mystero quietly. "I have neglected to say that Mr. Wheeler is under suspicion as well as the rest of you, and any appeal to him will be useless. We are here to find the thief, no matter who he is."

"That's right, Bailey," interjected Mr. Wheeler. "Now sit down and behave."

"I refuse to be a party in any such foolishness!" exploded Bailey angrily. "The idea of bringing me here under the suspicion of being a thief is preposterous! It's all tommy-rot, anyhow!"

Several of the others voiced the same opinion, and were about to leave the room, when the medium again interposed.

"There is no need for you to lose your tempers this way," he said quietly. "It is my intention to subject each of you to a very simple test, and if, after I have explained it, you still refuse to submit to this test, it will be pretty conclusive evidence that you have a guilty conscience, will it not?"

"No such thing! It's all tommy-rot, I tell you!" blustered Bailey.

"Then you refuse to submit to the test?" taunted Mystero.

"I didn't say that! What is your test, anyhow?"

"Now we are getting somewheres," smiled the medium. "Of course, if everybody refused to try the test, my efforts would be in vain; but I am under the impression that those of you who are innocent will have no apprehensions, while the guilty one will."

"Oh, I see!" sneered Bailey. "The man who refuses to take the test is the one who stole the papers! A very simple proceeding, to be sure!"

"But rather clever and effective, don't you think?" smiled Mystero. "Now, if you will please resume your seats, gentlemen, we will proceed."

Bailey subsided into his chair with a snort of disgust, and the others followed his example.

"Does anyone else object to this test?" inquired Mystero.

One of the older men shifted uneasily in his seat. "Don't you think

we had better be getting back to the office?" he asked, turning to Mr. Wheeler. "Of course you must know that this is all foolish nonsense; this fellow is making a fool of us."

"That may be so, Wandell, but I am paying the fee for being made a fool of—if such is the case—and I purpose to see it through," returned his employer testily. "Go ahead, Mystero, and get it over with."

At the medium's request, the others arose and followed him to the cabinet.

"This," he began, indicating the brass jardiniere, which was filled with a milky, sweet-scented fluid, "is my magic thief detecting water. You may examine it freely and see that there is nothing deceptive therein."

The others stared at the water curiously. It looked about as formidable as a bowl of milk, and yet it somehow inspired each man with the feeling that it might possibly hold potential qualities not to be trifled with.

"And this, gentlemen," continued Mystero, drawing back the curtain of the cabinet, "is my magic thief nabber, which works in conjunction with the magic water. You will please examine this and see that it is not connected with any electric wires or other deceptive apparatus."

He disclosed to view, the head of an enormous alligator, beautifully mounted, with bright glass eyes and distended jaws, displaying two double rows of very formidable teeth. The head rested on a small stand at the back of the cabinet.

"Will it bite?" asked Bailey facetiously.

"It will if the occasion arises," Mystero assured him very solemnly.

"Humph! It is dead, isn't it?"

"It appears to be. You are at liberty to examine it as much as you please."

In spite of their skepticism and the ridiculous statements of the medium, the sitters were becoming interested, and several stepped inside the cabinet and examined the head closely. They all refrained, however, from putting their hands between the distended jaws with their gleaming needle-sharp teeth.

"Why, these jaws are held open by strips of iron bent to the shape of the mouth!" exclaimed one of the investigating party. "It would be impossible for the alligator to close them, even were it alive!"

"Who said they would close, Belote?" demanded Bailey.

"No one; but I would infer as much from what the medium has said," answered Belote.

"Your inference is correct," said Mystero. "Those jaws are going to close on one of this party very shortly. Now, gentlemen, if you will be seated, we will proceed."

The sitters returned to their chairs and the medium again took up a position in front of them. "Mr. Wheeler," he began, "with your permission I will make you the first subject of this test."

"Certainly," responded the manufacturer, rising. "What am I to do?"

Mystero drew from his pocket a black sleevelet, which he adjusted on Mr. Wheeler's right arm. The sleevelet fitted tightly around the wrist and extended upward as far as the elbow.

"Now then," said the medium, "you

are to walk to that jar of magic thief detecting water, emerse your right hand into it to the wrist, three times, repeating aloud each time the magic word 'dickerydock.' You will then walk into the cabinet, draw the curtains so that you cannot be seen by those outside, insert your right arm into the mouth of the alligator and tap the small hand-bell which I have placed in the throat, three times. If you are innocent of the crime of stealing those papers, nothing at all will happen; if, however, you are the guilty man, the jaws will close instantly on your arm and hold you fast."

Exclamations of derision and incredulity greeted this ridiculous statement, and several of the sitters laughed outright. Mr. Wheeler and the medium, alone remained serious.

"This foolishness has gone far enough!" exclaimed Bailey, jumping up. "You are making dupes of all of us and I, for one, am not going to aid you further in this nonsense!"

"Bailey, shut up and sit down!" snapped Mr. Wheeler testily. "As I have already said, I am paying for this exhibition and I purpose to see it through. You are here merely in the capacity of my clerk, following my orders as usual, and, as usual, I am running my business, not you!"

"If you are innocent, there is absolutely nothing to fear," Mystero reminded him.

"Oh, rats!" retorted Bailey disgustedly, as he again resumed his seat. "I am not afraid of your old alligator, but I do hate to be made a fool of."

"Now you are talking sense," said Mr. Wheeler as he advanced to the jardiniere. He dipped his hand into the water three times, repeating the magic word each time, and was about to enter the cabinet when Mystero stopped him.

"You must remember to be sure and ring the bell with your right hand—the one that is wet with the magic thief detecting water," he cautioned. "It is very essential that you do this if the test is to be a success, as the magic thief detector works in conjunction with the magic thief nabber.

Bailey and several of the sitters snorted derisively at this information, but Mr. Wheeler nodded solemnly and entered the cabinet. A few seconds later, those outside heard the bell ring three times.

Mr. Wheeler emerged, looking a trifle pale. "I guess I am innocent," he chuckled; "but I certainly hated to put my arm in the reptile's mouth."

"I guess we're all innocent as far as this test is concerned," grunted Mr. Erb.

Mystero handed Mr. Wheeler a clean towel and instructed him to wipe his hand carefully and thoroughly. He then drew off the sleevelet and turned to the others.

"Who is the next man to try the test?" he asked.

Bailey jumped up promptly. "I stole a watermelon once, but I'll take a chance on your old crocodile," he laughed.

Mystero adjusted the sleevelet silently and Bailey advanced confidently to the jardiniere. He dipped his hand into the water three times, each dip accompanied by a sonorous "dickerydock," and then entered the cabi-

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The Third Doctor

BY CLAUDE N. SETTLES

A young doctor comes to a town after two of his predecessors had met mysterious and sudden deaths exactly within one year of their arrival. Undaunted by this history, the new doctor stays on the job. Here is what happened to the third doctor.

THE little cyclone heater in Doctor Stilman's office was roaring loudly. Outside, the blinding snow swirled and eddied in a driving wind, and entered even the smallest of crevices to lie in little drifts as if in defiant mockery to the efforts of the industrious stove. At the window stood the doctor looking out at the drifts as they piled higher and higher in the little narrow street. All day long it had been thus—and all the day before. The snow had come until everything was covered, yet the driving wind continued to bring it. The doctor was getting worried. There had been no calls for two days now, —something very unusual. The compulsory inertia was decidedly irksome. Here was his year drawing to a close,—the first year of his practice, which, as he had always been told, was the hardest. Truly, if there were to be any harder, he did not wish to experience them.

His reverie was suddenly disturbed, as he saw coming down the street, the stooped and bent figure of Squire Fenks, slowly and patiently plodding through the drifts. As was his custom, the old man was coming on his weekly trip for a chat with the doctor. He was the doctor's mainstay. Long ago the young man would have "pulled stakes" and shaken Heesville dust from his feet but for the older man's advice and companionship. And now the young doctor's entire nature changed as he saw the old man coming to him through such weather as this. It was a foolish sacrifice, yet he appreciated it.

"Hello, Squire!" he called, "how d' you like this for winter weather?"

The old man only smiled and shook his head. He stamped his feet wearily on the pine block which was used for a doorstep and entered.

The doctor saw in an instant that the old man had not come to cheer him up. He was there merely from a sense of duty. The old man was not feeling well. Silently he drew forward the only armchair in the room and sank into it with something like a sigh.

"What's the trouble, Squire?" asked the doctor jokingly. "Did you have sauerkraut for dinner?"

The squire only smiled sheepishly.

"Sonny, you've got me so you can read me like a book, ain't ye?" Then the troubled look came once more into his face and he lapsed into silence. The doctor tried again to get him to talk, but it was of no avail. Monosyllables were his only answers, and even these were given with no intelligence. At last the doctor gave up

and a long silence followed, until he grew restless once more. He went over to the old man and sat down beside him.

"Squire," he said kindly, "there's something seriously wrong. You're acting like some fourteen-year-old girl in love. I never did know you to moon around as you're doing tonight. Tell me what the trouble is."

He received no response. Reaching out, he laid his hand firmly on the old man's shoulder.

"Listen here," he exclaimed. "I've been here nearly a year, now, Squire —such a year as I never want to pass through again. I would never have gotten through if it hadn't been for you. I've always told you my troubles and you have always helped me to get around 'em. Every week you've come around here just to listen to my tale of woe and to cheer me up. Now it's my turn. 'Fess up. Here's where I pay back some honest debts."

The old man shuddered slightly, and raising his eyes, glanced quickly around the room. Not satisfied with that, he arose, and walking to the window, looked up and down the fast darkening street. With one more searching glance around the room, he sat down, industriously mopping his forehead with his red bandana. He reached out his hand and in an agitated manner grasped the doctor's knee.

"Doc," he cried eagerly, "are you superstitious?"

"Oh, it's along that line, is it? Seen a ghost, have you?" The doctor tried to laugh the old man out of his mood, but he was not in the mood himself. Moreover, the old man was keyed up to the point where he was determined that he would talk.

"I know you'll make fun of me, Doc, but I can't help it. Four years ago I would have laughed, too, but it's not funny now. No, it's not funny! Not now!" And he dropped his head forward in his hands and continued talking as if in a dream. "You laugh and say you're not superstitious. Everybody does. Everybody says that things just happened that way. That's the way they say things out loud, but way down deep inside, everybody knows that he's got some superstition; that there's some system or something that runs things. Doc," the old man roused up with a start, "did you know that people think this office is haunted?"

The doctor saw the old man's serious manner and refrained from smiling. "No, I don't think I ever heard of it. Why?"

"Well, we all thought we would never let you know, but I've changed my mind. I'm going to tell you all about it so you can look out—and get out if you want to.

"You see, the whole thing started when this shack was built. That's been four years ago. Old Doc Skibs was our doctor then and he wasn't much of a doctor. Folks always said it was his wife that did the curin' 'cause she was a witch. O' course I didn't believe nothin' in that—not then, though she did gather up an awful lot o' herbs. But anyway, old Doc Skibs, he was gettin' old and folks got so they didn't trust him much, and he was feeble and couldn't make the calls, and there was a sentiment come in that we ought to get a new doctor.

But we couldn't get one. There was no place for one to come to. So they decided to build this shack; and they did. They started in just working now and then, and the old doctor's wife like to had a fit, she was that jealous. She couldn't see that the doctor was gettin' old. She thought it was spite work. Two times the shack caught fire, but we managed to save it both times. Then I guess the old lady Skibs kind of changed her tactics, 'cause pretty soon she got so she'd come by every day and she'd laugh and joke the boys 'bout the old shack and she'd say they couldn't get a man to stay in it more'n a year fer anything. When we'd ask her why, she'd just tell us to wait—we'd see, we'd see; and then she'd cackle kind o' crazy like and wouldn't say nothin' more. 'Not more'n a year,' she'd say, 'not more'n a year!'

"Well, we finished up the shack and 'tweren't long till we got a young doc, just out o' college, and say, he was a good one. He come here and everybody liked him. He was a friend to everyone, especially to the kids. And he done a lot of things for this town. Made 'em drain off that old frog pond that used to be down back of the depot, and he made old Hank Reynolds clean up his baker shop, and made Jim Rickey fix his dairy, and I don't know what he didn't do, 'sides doctorin' the people. He was here *just* a year." Here the old Squire paused, got up, and walked the length of the room. "And that damned old woman just grinned and nodded her head and kept sayin,' 'I told you so. I told you. *Just* a year. I told you.' That's all she'd say." The old man paced the room until he became quiet once more. Then he continued:

"It was Jim Rickey done it, over that dairy business. He shot Doc in the back one night when he was going over to see Kate Bundy's little baby. They caught Jim three days later and hung him up without ever thinkin' of a trial, but that didn't bring the doctor back. We'd ought to a-hung that damned ——"

Here the old man choked and was silent. His companion waited expectantly. The sarcastic smile had faded from *his* face before the squire was half through. Now he was eager that the story go on.

"Doctor Signey came next, didn't he?" he prompted.

"Yes," the old man went on, "it was three or four months before we got anyone, but finally we did. He came from the same college as t'other one, and was just as good—only people didn't like him as well. He wasn't just as popular 'cause he wasn't just what he ought to be in some ways, and never went to church. But here's the big thing about it: *he was here just one year to the day.* It was the eighteenth of June, a year after he came here, that they found him, one morning, in a hotel room over to Seeville, layin' in the middle of the floor with a woman—both of them dead. There was a gun a-layin' between 'em and ye couldn't tell which one of 'em had done the shootin'. Both had been shot in the head at close range. Powder stains showed it. Nobody ever did find out who the woman was, nor how she got to town, no more'n if she'd dropped from the sky. Nobody ever seen her before at all. But that doesn't

matter. What matters is that it was *just a year* both times, and both times old lady Skibs went around to everybody, grinning and sayin,' 'I told ye so. None of 'em stays more'n a year.'

"Of course, everybody thought she had something to do with it both times, but we didn't know sure, and we couldn't prove nothin.' Then, too, we wanted to keep the thing hushed so's we could get another doctor. That's why we never told you the whole story. I'm tellin' you now, though, 'case it can't do no harm and it may do you some help. You can do just as you please, but I'd advise you to move and get away from here."

"Oh, pshaw, Squire, you're all worked up like the rest of the people, over nothing. Why, there's nothing behind all this. You admit, yourself, that the old woman had no direct connection with it, which only goes to show that the whole thing was a mere coincidence. Just because the other two doctors met a tragic death, doesn't mean that I must kick the bucket the same way. Yet—it does seem—rather strange—" he said slowly, trailing off into a deep study.

For a long time neither spoke. The doctor was more worried than he liked to admit. The squire broke the silence. "Don't you think you had better get out, Doc?"

He said it low, and with so much force that it sounded like a warning command. The doctor's worried look showed that he was thinking hard. He knew more than the squire thought he did.

"It all looks so crazy to me, Squire, yet—it might—be—"

"That's the trouble, Doc. As I said, there's nobody likes to believe in superstition. But take this into consideration: there's a chance that there might be somethin' to it. So don't you think you'd better come over to my house for tonight and tomorrow?"

"No," answered the doctor as he rose from the chair. "The whole thing seems like a blamed lot of foolishness when I look at it with common sense. Why, what would the fellows back home think if they heard I had run away from an office because I thought it was haunted?"

"Well, I hate to leave you, boy. I hope you have it right, but I'm very much afraid for you. I'm so much afraid that I'm going to say good-bye instead of good-night. Good-bye, Doc, I hope you're safe this time tomorrow." And the old man passed sorrowfully out into the storm, where the roaring wind fairly staggered him as he moved along in the deep drifts.

When he had gone, the doctor slowly proceeded to prepare his evening meal. The preparation was mere pastime. It was done from force of habit. When he sat down to eat he found he wanted nothing. The sight of everything disgusted him, and naturally, he felt disgusted with himself. Why should he let a little story like this bother him? There was nothing to it. But then, the squire had not told him all. He had made some things plain, which the doctor had never understood, though. The doctor remembered now. It was all as plain as day. A week or so after he had come to town he had been called out to see this old woman, this same old Mrs. Skibs. He never forgot how she cursed him and the way she

screamed: "You'll see! You'll see! Just one year!" She died that night, and the neighbors, who had called him against the old lady's wishes, would tell him nothing. Now he had an explanation.

That death-bed scene kept running again and again through his mind. He paced the room, thinking. The more he thought, the more worried and depressed he became. The air seemed close and stifling. He must get out and away from there. The room itself and everything in it became a terror from which he must flee. He seized his hat and coat and started for the door. As he reached it, he hesitated. For the first time, he noticed the wind. He heard it raging in a perfect blizzard outside. Absentmindedly, he laid his hand upon the latch. In an instant it was wrenched from his grasp as if by some unseen force. It swung, as with a vengeance, and struck him full in the face, knocking him sprawling. In a second of time he was on his feet, terror fairly shaking his frame.

There are times when even the bravest of men lose their nerve. When brought to battle with the supernatural they become as children in the dark. This was the doctor's condition. He stood panic-stricken, waiting for the next blow, but none came. Nothing was there except the rushing icy wind and the blinding snow. Trembling, he cautiously closed the door and lighted the extinguished light. As he poked the fire to warm up the now chilled room he began to see his own foolishness. He laughed to himself, "I must have the jim-jams." He merely muttered, but the sound of his own voice made him shudder.

For a long time, he paced the floor, and finally, as a last resort, decided to go to bed. He undressed in the now cold room and shivering almost in a nervous fit, climbed in. There he lay in wide-eyed terror, his ears strained to every little sound. The creaking of a shutter; the sudden twang of a bedspring; everything set him to trembling anew. At last he could stand it no longer. He got up, dressed again, and once more walked the floor in agitation. He attempted to reason the whole thing out sensibly. Surely it was all absurd, this thing of *"just a year."* It was absolutely ridiculous. Even if there had been anything to it, there was no danger now. The old woman was dead and could have no more influence. Gradually, as the room became warmer, he became calmer, and at last he dozed.

When he awoke it was dark and he was utterly bewildered. The fire had gone out and the room was as still as death. Even the familiar ticking of his watch was not to be heard. He had forgotten to wind it. The silent darkness grew thicker around him and pressed in upon him like a weight. His breath began to come in short gasps as he felt some terrible something behind the blackness, which was slowly creeping upon him. He covered his head to stifle a scream. Oh, why had he not gone with the squire? Why not go yet? He uncovered his head and listened—listened for that invisible something which he knew not. He *must* get out and get away before he went mad. With a jerk, he flung back the covers and sprang out. He hastily lighted the light and started

the fire, and gained some courage.

"No, I'm *not* going," he stamped his foot in self censure. "I'm a fool. I've got to stick now. Must be four o'clock. Two hours till daylight—God! wish I knew sure—damned old woman—I can see her yet, the night she died. She just kept screaming it 'I told ye, I told ye, *just a year.*' God! what if she gets me? What if she does?" he almost screamed.

Here he seemed to bring himself up with a jerk.

"I'm a damned fool. Never was superstitious before—very. She said '*just* a year.' Damn. I must have a sedative. I'll go crazy! I can see her yet. Old hag! Sedative—hydrocyanic acid—dilute—strongest known. Ugh! she was ugly! And my year's up at six o'clock!"

As he talked, he staggered to the shelves and took down a bottle and poured a glass full. In an abstracted manner he placed the bottle on the shelf and turned to the stove, muttering, "and she said *just* a year and mine's up at six o'clock—two hours."

Suddenly he sprang back in terror. "Lord God! look at the ants!"

Around the stove circled a dozen or more large black ants that had been thawed from the half rotten chunk of wood in the corner.

"Oh, I see," he exclaimed, as he saw where they came from. "What d'ye know about that? Ha!" He tipped the glass slowly, talking to himself the while. "Old rip! got two before me—thinks she'll get me. Folks think it, too. Think I'll be the third!"

A bit of the liquid ran from the tipped glass and fell upon an ant as it crawled stupidly along the half-warm floor. The liquid had hardly touched it before the insect was dead.

"Huh! Dead! And I started to drink it! Concentrated!" The glass dropped from his nervous fingers and fell with a crash. In his sudden fright, his nerves broke down completely. He fairly screamed. "Damned old hag! She's after me! Concentrated hydrocyanic acid! Deadly poison! God! She almost made me drink it! She's after me! I must get out!"

Seizing his hat and coat, he rushed headlong from the shack, leaving the door wide open.

The next morning, the worried squire returned. He found the disordered room, the broken glass, the nice white drift of snow piled from the door to the now cold stove, and his heart sank. He knew the worst had come.

He went in to the telephone and called the neighbors and they all went in search. They found him in the stable behind his horse, lying as if asleep. A hoofprint on his big chest told the whole story, while lines of anguish, written over all his face, showed what a night he had spent. It was the face of an older man by ten years.

For some moments they looked on in silence, with bared heads. Then a husky, hollow sounding whisper came from one of the group:

"Boys, it's just a year—*just one year*—and he's the third," and he expressed the thoughts of the whole group when he added slowly, "I wonder if—it's—her!"

But no one answered.

The Desert's Drink

BY FRANK LOFTUS

A chase for a "killer" takes a sheriff across the Texas desert. The sheriff gets his man and then searches a dictionary to discover if he got away!

T was midsummer and West Texas. I repeat, for the sake of force and emphasis, that it was midsummer and West Texas. New York or Chicago would not do as well to convey the idea of locality, and the trite phrase, "Hot as Hades," shrinks in adjectival comparison with "Midsummer and West Texas." In the aforesaid cities, the asphalt streets were as soggy as dough, and hot tar oozed out from between brick paving. Little lives were snuffed out, suffocated by the sultry heat. In the subway crowds, hundreds of women fainted; down town, people dropped dead. All this with the mercury standing below a hundred. But in West Texas, it was 118 in the shade —and there was no shade.

The blinding glare of the alkali plain stretched on in the afternoon sun. Here and there, a cactus plant lifted its uncanny bulk and taunted the parched traveller with its lush gray greenness. Their startling variety of clumsiness was all that broke the dismal monotony of the scorching desert. And yet, the lizards and scorpions basking lazily with unblinking eyes in the torturing sun, had long since heard the hoofbeats, but not until the lone rider appeared did they scamper away.

"God! this is the devil's own country—no, the devil would not have it as a gift, not even enough water for him." The rider removed his hat and brushed his shirt-sleeves across his blurred and weary eyes, stinging from the dust particles and smarting-red from the glare of the white desert with its writhing heat waves. His throat throbbed with thirst, and choking as the dust seared his throat, he raised his water bottle and drained it to the last drop. He leaned forward on his horse. "This is the trail, though,—left hind shoe missing. "Get on," his harsh voice rasped as the horse stumbled. And then on he rode, following the faint trail across what seemed to the pursuer, to be miles of interminable desert.

The setting sun found the lone rider dizzily reeling in his saddle. Suddenly, a dark speck in the distance caused him to straighten in his saddle and shade his eyes with his hand. "Must be that well they told me I'd find—must be," he muttered weakly, urging his tired horse to greater effort. Loosing his hold on the reins, he tightly held to the saddle horn to steady his swaying, and gouged the horse with his spurs to keep him going. When they were near to the dark spot he emitted a hoarse whisper of despair. The dark spot was

nothing but the dead carcass of a horse, but seeing a canteen strap, the weakened rider, slowly, painfully, dismounted. He walked a few steps, stooped, then fell huddled in a heap. The canteen was crushed beneath the carcass of the horse. And yet, but a quarter of a mile farther was the water he was seeking. And lying beside the water-hole, hand shaded over eyes which anxiously scanned the plain, was the man whom the lone rider had trailed over half a country.

"Hit's him," Lem Watson remarked to himself, "and I expect he's got stroked pretty bad. He'll stay there a long time." Then Watson remembered the horrible tales of suffering anguish experienced by men who had nearly died in the desert; some of them had lost their minds, while others had come through all right, but had left a blanket-mate or partner to pay toll for the lack of water. Having thought of all these things, it was the better side of Lem Watson's nature that prompted him to decide to go to the aid of the fallen man. "I'll relieve him of his gun and then bring him to with this whiskey. I'll need his horse, though, to get away on. I can show him the way to this water-hole, and then he can wait until someone comes along this trail. By that time, I'll be well on my way to Mexico." Lem Watson thought these things and murmured them half aloud to himself. Then he started toward the prostrate figure.

When his rider pitched forward on the ground and lay there still, the horse looked at him for several minutes and then walked slowly over to investigate, nosing the silent figure. The wet nose and tongue were enough to arouse Shaw—the man who had fallen, but had not entirely fainted away. He started to rise, but saw a figure rise up off the ground a quarter of a mile away. In his weakened condition, he foresaw that he would not be able to do much, for he recognized the figure by now, as the man he had been trailing. "Same height, same stoop, same limp," he muttered to himself. But with the hand on the side furthermost from the approaching man, he slowly, carefully, slid out a small derringer and a pair of handcuffs and let them rest under his coat near that hand. His larger revolver was on the opposite side and he could not remove it without being seen by Watson. Then he closed his eyes and simulated unconsciousness.

Watson slowly approached with his gun in hand, covering the unconscious man. Bending over him, he carefully lifted Shaw's gun out of its scabbard and put it in his own pocket. Satisfied then, that the man was unconscious, he drew out a whiskey flask and laid his own gun on the sand. Then, seeming to think of his get-away, he ran out and caught the horse, bringing him in close and tying him, Texas fashion, which is not tying him at all, but leaving the bridle reins hanging over his head to the ground. In this way, a Texas pony will stand for hours just as securely as if he were tied to a *bois d'arc* post or a mesquite tree. Through long eyelashes, Shaw saw all this, but closed his eyes when Watson approached him, and he gripped the handcuffs tighter. Watson raised the head of the seemingly unconscious man with

one hand, while with the other he put the whiskey flask to his lips and poured the hot stuff down his throat. This position put Watson's wrists within three or four inches of each other—all that Shaw wanted. With a quick, sliding motion, he had fastened the handcuffs on the wrist that was near his throat and had forced it over until the other half of the steel bracelet had snapped over the other wrist. So quickly was it done, that Watson had not even time to think. Then he ripped out a few curses and growled:

"That's a hell of a nice trick to play on a fellow that was tryin' to do you a favor, ain't it?"

"Never mind, my friend. I had my duty to perform and I cannot stop to consider the trivial act you were doing for me."

"Trivial! If I hadn't come along, you'd have died here, that's what. Your bones would 'a rotted. If you had any sense you'd have knowed better than to come into this country here with such a small hat. Tryin' to save you from sufferin' damnation, and then you nab me like that!" Watson's words were burning with resentment.

"That will do for that," returned Shaw rather sharply. "I have to take you back to Chicago and it makes no difference to me whether I found you in the desert of Sahara—though it can't be much worse than this God-forsaken place. If I got the right idea, there is a watering-place over there where you came from, and we'll go over there and camp for the night. Then we'll go on to Las Pinto by this trail. They say it is not far."

When they had eaten supper by the water-hole, they lay down on the broad, warm prairie with the turquoise sky studded with diamonds for a cover. Out in the quiet places with the stars shining so brightly from the southern sky—much brighter than they seem to shine anywhere else, and nothing around you but a broad, swelling stretch of land, the world seems mighty large, and you seem very lonesome. It was probably due to this feeling and partly to the cigarettes which Shaw allowed him to have in compliance with his request, that Watson started talking.

"Say, do you think I'm sorry I killed that brute? Why, I'd do the same thing over again. When that northern fellow, Williams, a sort of artist, he was, come down to our place, we naturally treated him with all the hospitality we could. We did everyone that-a-way. We had a mighty fine place, there—" the speaker paused and took an extra inhale of the cigarette. "Williams commenced lovin' my sister. She was warm-blooded—a beautiful girl." Again Watson stopped and looked afar off, and then at the bright evening star which seemed like a small moon itself, and very close. Shaw, laying out there where the world seemes very large, also thought. We will not drag in the privacy of Shaw's thoughts, but as Watson went on, one of the things in his mind was to unlock the steel bracelet that bound his wrist to Watson's—but he did not. "When she died," continued Watson, "the shock also killed my father. I swore over her grave that I would kill Williams if I had to go to the ends

of the earth. I'd do the same thing over again. Any man would."

The next morning, Shaw unlocked the handcuffs and let Watson get the breakfast, keeping him well covered all the while. Then they travelled on. Watson sometimes travelling on foot, and at others, doubling up on the horse with Shaw. They stopped at noon and Watson again got the meal ready, but this time they had to drink the water they had brought along, for there was no water-hole near. No sooner had they started again, after dinner, than the horse, which had been weakened during the latter part of the journey, stumbled in a small hole and fell. Shaw escaped unhurt, but the canteens of water were both crushed. Upon investigation it was found that the horse's leg was broken, and at Watson's suggestion, he was shot.

The pulsing heat waves rose unmercifully as two figures ploughed with plunging steps through the alkali. In a cracked, parched voice, one of them—Shaw—spoke.

"Las Pinto can't—can't be more'n eight miles." His voice ended in a wheeze.

The other man was straining his eyes through inflamed eyelids. He had seen a spot that differed from the usual heat-spots, because it kept its place on the ground and did not dance off into the air before his tired eyes. He pointed it out to the other man.

"It's off the trail," he said, "but if you want to—"

"For God's sake, yes. Give me water."

Then, as he noticed that there was not a sign of a beaten trail—which there would have been if it had been a regular watering-place, Watson thought he understood. And every toiling, torturing, tediously hurrying minute since then, deepened his conviction. He had heard of and read about those places in the desert-plains. The Indians had used them. When they neared the water, Watson ran forward, peered down into it, and then as he noticed several crawfish and tadpoles swimming, he appeared satisfied and scooped up a hatful of it. It was green and it stunk, but he carried it over to Shaw. Then he hesitated and spoke huskily:

"I can't do it. Ef I had wanted to kill you, I would have left you lay where I first saw you. This water has arsenic in it. You know what that means." Across the mind of Shaw there stood out a vivid picture which was painted on a calendar hanging in his office. Two prospectors had become lost in the desert, one of them becoming crazed for water. Finally, they lurched, swaying dizzily down into a pocket, only to find at the end some bleached bones around the pool. One had enough sense left to realize that it was arsenic, and by fighting, half-killing his crazed companion, he managed to drag him away. Below the picture was a description of it. "I had this in mind when I brought you over here," continued Watson. "But instead of giving it to you so as to get away from you, I'll escape you by taking it myself."

Uttering a hoarse, horrified shriek, Shaw sprang forward, but too late. Watson had taken two swallows of the stuff before Shaw knocked it out of his hand.

"Good-bye, Sheriff. I wouldn't let you take me back because—because they wouldn't u-n-d-e-r-s-t-a-n-d." The speaker's voice trailed away and then he lay still. His eyes closed, his face bulged, and his lips were blue. Shaw shook him, but seeing how useless it was, left the dead man and staggered to his feet.

Shaw, seated in his office in Chicago with his friend, Doctor Malloy, whose office was next door, pointed to the picture of the two prospectors by the arsenic pool of water and told the story.

"Did you say that water was green in color?" asked Doctor Malloy, when he had finished. Receiving a reply in the affirmative, he directed Shaw to come into his office. There he took down the first volume of a row of books labelled: "MEDICO-ANALYTIC ENCYCLOPEDIA." Turning the pages, he stopped, and traced his finger: "Here it is," he said, and Shaw followed his tracing:

ARSENIC:—One of the chemical elements, a mineral poison, a soft, gray-colored metal. It is found in South America, Australia, and in some places in the Arizona desert of the United States. An erroneous opinion exists to the effect that some is found in Western Texas, but the only known pools in Western United States are in Arizona. The mineral found in Western Texas closely resembles arsenic. (See "Apnœum".) Arsenic is a fatal poison. See Appendix for antidote."

Shaw eagerly seized the volume from Malloy's hands, and turned back a few pages. "A-p; a-p-l; a-p-m; here we are."

APNŒUM:—A mineral of a green color closely resembling arsenic, but not as poisonous or deadly. A small amount only produces a swelling of the veins, and a stupor resembling death, slowing the heart action very considerably, but passing off in a few hours. Found only in Western Texas and New Mexico of the United States. Has not been used to any advantage in the medical profession."

Shaw closed the book with a bang. "Well, I'll be— say, do you suppose that fool knew that?" he exclaimed suddenly. "I wonder—"

The Nick of Time

BY E. HAROLD CUMMINGS

Imprisoned in the face of a huge clock, and the minute hand threatening death in 15 *minutes, is the plot that would have challenged the imagination of Poe.*

HIGH up on the city's tallest tower, the big clock turned its face to the morning sun. In the lower quarter of its face a small square door slid open and a man looked out. Then, thrusting his arms out first, he began to crawl slowly through the opening. In his hand he carried a pot of gilt paint and a brush, for the old clock was to have the numerals on its face regilded.

But the man seemed to be having trouble. He was a very fat man, and the door was very narrow. When his body was part way out, he stuck. Placing his hands against the edge, he pushed outward. Finding this of no avail, he reversed the operation and discovered that he could not get back again. Far below him, he could see tiny black figures moving along the street. He shouted, but the figures went on unheeding. He squirmed and twisted, but every move only seemed to wedge his round body more tightly into the square hole. The sun rose higher and blazed into his eyes. Then, as if ashamed of what it saw, it retired suddenly behind a bank of fog which rolled in from the sea and enveloped the tower in its thick gray folds.

Groaning with the effort, the man at last writhed his body about until he could look up at the great black face of the clock. How vast it looked! The two great bronze hands indicated a quarter before eight. The minute hand was at least five feet long, and from his angle of observation, it seemed to the imprisoned man to be as thin and sharp as the blade of a sword. If nothing stopped the march of that hand, in less than one hour it would swing round the circle and cut him in two! The thought dazed him for a moment. Then, with the strength of terror, he struggled and wrenched at the boards that held him captive, but their grip about his waist would not loosen. Cold sweat came out upon his forehead. Would no one ever look up? Would the fog never lift?

Ah! The striker. Surely someone would glance up at the clock when the big bell boomed the hour of eight. Only five minutes now. He could see the big hand creeping nearer and nearer to twelve. Three minutes more—two minutes—less than one minute. Suddenly the steady tack-tock, tack-tock, within the tower, changed to a whirring sound. He placed his hands over his ears and braced himself for the shock. Came a loud click and then—silence. The monotonous ticking went on as before. He remembered. He had disconnected the strik-

ing mechanism so as not to be deafened by the bell.

Nothing now but to wait for the end. He closed his eyes. Every muscle of his body ached. Was there no way out, he wondered dully. Again he became aware of that relentless tack-tock, tack-tock, within the tower. Would it never stop? Every stroke seemed to beat into his brain. He opened his eyes and looked up at the creeping minute hand. Only five minutes gone!

At precisely thirty-six minutes past eight, he figured, the hand would touch his body. Then it would take two, perhaps three minutes of agony to penetrate far enough to kill him. At just 8.39 he would die! From 8.06 to 8.39 there was thirty-three minutes. The clock would tick just one thousand, nine hundred and eighty times more, he calculated rapidly. No, only 1, 979—1,978—1,977. Mechanically he went on counting the metallic voice of his doom and watched the hand creep round the circle. At 1,694 a sudden thought made him lose the count. If he threw his paint pot down it might hit someone.

Just then the sun shone forth. As he raised his arm, the gilt paint flashed brightly. With that flash came an inspiration. Why hadn't he thought of it before? He dipped the brush into the pot. Straining his body upward, he reached up as high as he could on the clock face and drew the brush downward. A broad streak of gold gleamed in the sunlight. Dipping again, he drew a horizontal line touching the first at its center. Then with swift, broad strokes, he painted, stretching as far as his arm would reach. Across the black face flamed a single word:

HELP

Then he lay back, breathing heavily, and fixed his eyes upon the slow, remorseless hand. It crept nearer. It was at the point of the VI now. In six minutes—five and a half—five and a quarter—

The sun beat down cruelly upon his head. Trivial thoughts began to flash through his brain, crowding upon each other in confusion. He remembered things he had done and said years before, in his childhood days. Then he was upon a long, winding road. A procession was approaching. In the distance he could hear the dull boom, boom, boom of the bass drum. Why did they play that drum so steadily? Then suddenly the drum stopped. A terrible pain racked his body. Confused, far-off voices were shouting, and he heard blows struck on wood. There came a ripping, tearing sound, and he felt himself being pulled inward.

The great machinery was silent. Close beside it, with his hand upon a lever, stood a man, bareheaded. Another man, with an axe in his hand, bent over him as he slowly opened his eyes.

"Well, man," he said, "I guess we got here just in the nick of time. Another minute, and the nick would have been a cut."

"Yeh," puffed the other, "it was some run up those stairs, but when we saw that there sign, we knew something was up."

The rescued man did not speak, but the grip of his hand spoke more than words to his rescuers.

The Posteristic Temperament

BY G. B. WIMSATT

This is a peep into a bill-board poster's heart—we mean his artistic heart. It's also another boost for the old adage about Cupid eluding the skill of locksmiths, not to mention contrary parents.

WHEN it is written that Bill had temperament and yet held a good job as bill-poster, it will at once be understood that Bill had also sobriety, industry, honesty, an engaging personality, and some pull with the manager. Bill was an inspired artist in the arrangement of signs and posters, and delighted in designing billboards that were not only zoologically harmonious, but also, consistent as to sense.

He did not confront the black pussy of "Cat's-paw Rubber Heels" with the ferocious brindle bull of "Bull-dog Polish," or perch "Red Raven Splits" beside "Robin's Egg Blueing," or feature "Anti-fat" and "Sanatogen" on the same fence, or follow "Hunter's Rye Whiskey" with "The Curse of Drink." But inspiration is not what a company pays its bill-posters for; its workings are adjusted to mediocrity, and excellence throws it out of gear; and therefore, Bill's company almost parted with him when a delegation from a booming suburb represented that a conspicuous sign-board fronting their main thoroughfare had greeted all comers with "Settle in Oaklawn!" "Take Zeff for Chills!" "Doctor Kilmer's Swamp-root Cures Malaria." "Insure Your Life with the Prudential," "Smith's Funerals are Cheap," "Family Lots, or Single Graves in Oaklawn Cemetery at Attractive Prices."

To this charge, Bill had responded that experienced men were always allowed some latitude in placing their posters, and that as the board in question was painted black, he had posted it with the most appropriate signs, and had reserved "Gayety Burlesquers" and "Aunt Jemima's" for fences farther on, where they would strike no discordant note. Bill conveyed the impression that the citizens of Oaklawn were lacking in appreciation for the higher kind of bill-posting.

However, as Bill's manager needed men just then, and as he owned no property in Oaklawn, he had chosen to regard the ominous board rather as an exuberance of temperament than as a manifestation of perverted humor, and had not divorced Bill from his paste bucket and posters.

"I can't help it, boss," said Bill. "When I'm sad I can't put up anything but the doleful sheets, and when I'm feeling good I can't post the 'Merry Maidens' and 'Sunny Jims' fast enough."

"You've got the posteristic temperament, Bill," said the manager. "Hold it under, or you'll lose your job."

But on this Monday afternoon, Bill's temperament ached to voice the gloom of his soul, and no warning could have stayed him as he approached the new board fence that awaited his touch to blossom into glory. Had Bill been a musician, he would have composed a "Kreutzer Sonata"; had he been an artist he would have produced a "Melancholia," but being only a bill-poster, he selected from his roll of sheets seven dark and depressing placards bearing the words, "Blue Monday," strung them the length of the fence, with no information regarding the laundry soap that would change the complexion of the day, which properly should have followed them; then, mounting as far as possible from an unsympathetic world, he climbed the little stepladder placed exactly in front of the middle sign, humped himself in the attitude of a sick crow, and reveled in his misery.

Mamie did not love him, Mamie did not like him; Mamie positively hated him—at least, such were the unconcealed sentiments of Mamie's mother, and Mamie had made no sign that she did not share these views. For three successive Monday nights, Bill had called on Mamie, and incidentally and undesignedly, on Mamie's mother, who had seemed not unappreciative of his drollery, when he had inquired for Mamie in the classic phrase, "'Have you a little fairy in your home,' Mrs. Malone?" But now he must break the pleasant sequence, for Mrs. Malone, having come upon him as he was posting a board with advertisements of "Orangeade" and "Orange Groves in Florida," had conceived the deadly suspicion that he was an Orangeman, and despite his frenzied protests, had indignantly informed him that her doors would be closed to him Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and especially, Mondays. Oh, it was seven times blue Monday for poor Bill, and no power on earth could have kept him from proclaiming it.

Bill knew that before long, Mamie, who was saleslady at the glove counter, would pass on her way from the store where she worked; he feared she would be accompanied by Archie Exline, the floor-walker; and he hoped she would read the meaning in the words beyond his drooping form, and cast him a pitying glance. He considered the advisability of attempting the downfall of Archie by sending a trickle of slippery paste across the pavement, but remembering that Mamie, too, would have to cross the snare, he relinquished the bright plan and waited.

Before the paste on the placards was dry, Bill, looking up the street, glimpsed the feather on Mamie's hat just in time to sink back into the wilted pose which had been temporarily disturbed by a yawn. Though his jealousy had prophesied it, Bill's heart sank as he saw Archie strolling beside her, and he regretted that he had had another thought about the paste.

"Well, he asked me to fit them on him, and ain't it my business to try gloves on customers when they ask me? No, I didn't take any longer than if it had been a lady—well, not much longer, anyhow. I hope, Mr.

Exline, you are not growling because I try to please a customer—" drifted up to Bill, as Mamie, usually so alert and observant of everything, held Archie in an absorbing dispute and passed on without a glance at the figure of woe, or the tell-tale signs beyond it.

When she had turned the corner, Bill came slowly down from his perch; he looked in his roll for more "Blue Mondays," but finding none, sighed and remarked, "Well, even 'Rough-on-Rats' wouldn't express it," folded the stepladder, took his brush from the bucket, and prepared to move on.

"Hi, Bill! Wait, Bill! Did you think I didn't see you?" panted Mamie, whisking furtively around the corner. "I had to do it, Bill, for I knew Archie would tell Ma if I spoke to you, and she has such a grouch on you, I wanted to give her time to simmer down before you came around again. Archie? Oh, I just keep Archie around to distract Ma's attention. There's nothing doing there but a bluff. I shunted him at the gate and sneaked back to tell you. What are you up to, Bill? Going back to work? Well, I like that—I don't think! So long!"

"Aw, Mame, don't you see what it is?" protested Bill, as he unrolled the seven "Sunny Monday" sequels to the "Blue Monday" signs. "I make the old posters say what I feel. That—" pointing to the "Blue Mondays"—"is how it seemed to me when I thought you had gone back on me; and this—" posting the second signs over the first—"is the way it seems now. Mame, I'm coming around this evening. Will you be out front?"

"Well, you are the funny fellow, Bill," giggled Mamie, blushing as she studied the signs. "Yes, I'll be there, but unless Ma is in the parlor chinning to the policeman, she will be sure to make a fuss. Well, if you want to take a chance, Bill—"

"Mamie, I'd take a chance if she was my own landlady and I hadn't paid my board! Oh, skip, Mame! Here she comes around the corner!"

"Was that the skirt-tails of my Mamie, I saw frisking around the corner, Bill Brown?" demanded Mrs. Malone, puffing up to the radiant Bill.

Bill's brush continued to caress the "Sunny Mondays" as Bill, in words as smooth as the paste in his bucket, assured Mrs. Malone that her daughter, escorted by Mr. Exline, had passed down the street fifteen minutes before, but had not stopped to speak to him. If Mrs. Malone did not believe him, she could ask Mr. Exline.

"It's well for her she didn't, Bill Brown," declared Mrs. Malone. "My Mamie is too young to know her own mind—but her mother isn't! That Archie Exline is no Orangeman! He's a gentleman, he is, not a common workman, and Mame could live like a lady if she married him, and would thank her old mother for guiding her. Keep away if you want to keep out of trouble, young man." Mrs. Malone departed haughtily, only pausing to remark significantly, "And my gentleman friend is the policeman on the beat."

That evening, as Bill approached Mrs. Malone's dwelling, the warning in her parting words still lingered in

his mind and he peered ahead for the threatened trouble. But it was not the apprehended evil that loomed before him. "Archie!" muttered Bill, as he watched a figure turn in at the gate and seat itself beside the figure on the bench before the door. "Mame didn't invite *him* here this evening. He's butting in!" continued Bill resentfully, as, stooping, he picked up a small stone and embedded it in the stiff little bouquet he held behind his back.

As he drew nearer, Bill noticed that the bench on which Mamie and Archie sat seemed as though, by some invisible agency, it were being slowly tilted at one end and letting Archie slide down toward the other, where Mamie was taking up as little space as possible.

"Lots of room on that bench for one more," called Bill, as he fumbled with the catch on the gate.

"Not enough for a sticky bill-poster!" responded the gentlemanly Archie.

"Biff!"

"Help! Help! He has murdered me! Mr. Flynn! Mr. Flynn!" shouted Archie, doubled over and clasping himself fondly around the waist.

"Scoot, Bill!" shrieked Mamie. But too late, for Policeman Flynn, eager to prove himself a man of power in the eyes of Mrs. Malone, who hurried from the parlor at his heels, already had the ill-advised Bill in his grasp. "Shut up, Archie! No, Ma; Bill didn't touch him; he didn't do anything but throw a bunch of geraniums at the old sissy for a joke!"

"Gee-raniums!" murmured Archie.

"Oh, why did you try to be funny, Bill? Ma, stop fussing over Archie; he's just pretending to be hurt to make trouble for poor Bill! What's a bunch of flowers? Actresses have bouquets thrown at them all the time, and they don't mind! Oh, everybody's down on Bill!" wailed Mamie, and overcome by grief at the injustice of the world, she fled into the house.

Mrs. Malone shut the front door after her daughter and appealed to the law. "It's well we poor weak women have someone to protect us, Mr. Flynn. This Bill Brown is a dangerous character and has pestered me to death, hanging around here, making eyes at my Mamie. Lock him up, Mr. Flynn, and it's a good job you'll be doing."

"Be calm, madam. I'll deal with him," replied Flynn pompously. "He wouldn't get anything but a light fine for hitting a man with a bunch of posies, but I'll keep him out of your way, never fear."

Dragging Bill by the collar and followed by Mrs. Malone, and at a safer distance by the still dazed Mr. Exline, Flynn made his way to the corner. Taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, and still clutching Bill, he drew a line from one side of the street to the other. "Do you see that line?" he inquired. "There will be another just like it at the other end of the street. See that you keep on the outside of them, for if I catch you on this Marshall Street, between Green and Locust, I'll have you up as a suspicious character. You're warned. Now git!" And Policeman Flynn pushed Bill across the line and grinned.

Across the chalk line that marked

for him the boundaries of Paradise, Bill addressed himself to Mrs. Malone. "Mrs. Malone, ma'am, far be it from me to contend with a lady, and so I'm glad it's a man I have against me now. There's no policeman living that can keep me from saying what I want to say to Miss Mamie. Why, Mrs. Malone, I could propose to her right under his eyes and he wouldn't know it! And I'll do it, too, Mrs. Malone, ma'am!"

"Hear the fellow boast!" jibed Mrs. Malone. "Let me see you so much as pass the time of day to Mame when Mr. Flynn is around and I'll give my consent and dance at your wedding!"

"Will you, truly, Mrs. Malone? Will you? Will you?"

"Yes, and I'm safe enough in saying it," replied Mrs. Malone scornfully. "Ain't I, Mr. Flynn?"

"That you are," answered Flynn, under her trusting gaze. "Move on! Move on!" he blustered proudly, though Bill, having sent his challenge, was already gone.

But around the corner, screened from the eyes of his persecutors, all Bill's proud bearing left him, and as he slunk toward his home, properly woe-begone, as becomes one who has vaunted vain-gloriously, he murmured to himself, "And yesterday I laughed when I posted up that revivalist's sign, 'Hell is upon you'!"

"Brown," said the manager, a week later, "if you can come out of your trance long enough, take these posters and paste the new sign-board we have put up on Marshall Street, near the corner of Locust. Make a neat job of it, for that board can be seen from the cars."

"Marshall Street! Near the corner of Locust! Do you mean it, Mr. Greeg? Oh, by the Gold-dust Twins, it's too good to be true! Gimme those posters! Hooray, hooray!"

"It's his temperament loose again," sighed the manager, as Bill sped through the door. "I wish I had someone else to put on the job."

Could the manager have seen how gaily Bill appproached the new board on Marshall Street, near the corner of Locust, directly opposite Mrs. Malone's, he might well have felt uneasy. Bill gazed fondly at the bright blank space, and with a fatuous smile, patted the posters designed for its adornment.

Across the street from the new billboard and the ardent worker, sat Mrs. Malone and Mr. Flynn, discussing the weather, and quite unconscious that the wicked old bench had been up to its tilting tricks again and settled them close together at the more sheltered end. As Bill set up his little stepladder with a frank clatter, Mrs. Malone looked up, and with an exclamation of surprise, dug her elbow into the ribs of the unwary Flynn. "Well, if there ain't that Bill Brown flourishing himself right under our eyes! The cheek of him! I'm glad Mamie is upstairs taking her nap, but it will do no harm for me to run up and listen at her door and make sure all is quiet, while you go over and arrest him, Mr. Flynn. Come back when you have locked him up and try some of that home-made wine I put up the year poor Timothy died. Ah, it's twelve long years it's been—"

Mrs. Malone bustled indoors and in a few minutes bustled out again,

meeting Officer Flynn at the door.

"Have you arrested him so soon?" she asked.

"No; there he is still," answered Flynn. "He swears it's a piece of work that's been assigned to him and I can't very well arrest a man when he's only doing his work. But he can't play any tricks on me, Mrs. Malone. He won't be long on that job, so bring out that grape-juice you was telling me about and I'll sit here and keep an eye on him."

"Fine!" agreed Mrs. Malone. "As we know Mamie is safe asleep upstairs, we can sit at our ease and laugh at the rascal."

When Mrs. Malone brought out the home-made wine and set it on the bench between them, it was surprising how steadily the bench behaved, not once tilting itself in its usual manner. "It must be thirsty work, posting," commented Mrs. Malone with malicious satisfaction, as she filled Flynn's glass.

"It's the grand grape-juice you make, Mrs. Malone," complimented Flynn. "I don't care how long it takes to post those signs."

"I'm glad Mamie is sound asleep up there," Mrs. Malone felicitated herself, while Mamie, aroused possibly by some watchful cupid, but more probably by the click of the glasses, stood in the upper window, casting on the couple below, glances of amusement and contempt.

On the other side of the street, Bill stirred his paste and appeared oblivious to all but his work. Only once did he dare look toward the upper window and catch the eyes that watched him above the heads of the unconscious couple on the bench; then with a little nod toward the board, he started to work. Very deliberately, he spread out his roll of posters and with inspiration in his eyes, sorted and selected until he had eliminated all but nine sheets. Pushing aside the discard with his foot, and grasping his brush like a lance set for the tilt, Bill advanced to the board, clasping to his breast nine placards, which celebrated a toilet soap, a cracker, a ladies' journal, a scouring powder, an island adjoining Cuba, an after-dinner confection, a shaving stick, and a shoe polish. With a flourish, he raised the tidings of "Sweetheart Soap" on his brush, and affixed it in the upper left-hand corner of the board; then with "Uneeda Biscuit" he covered the word "Soap" in the first advertisement, and exalted a "Woman's Home Companion" in its entirety, taking care that it overlapped "Biscuits." Next, he featured the "Old Dutch Cleanser" caption, "Try Me" on a new line, and beneath it, paragraphed the "Isle of Pines," the last word of which was blotted out by the "U" from the "U-All-No" mints, and stepped back to view the effect. In glaring ill-assorted letters, the message on the board stood out for Mamie and all the rest of the world, to read:

SWEETHEART—UNEEDA—
WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION.
TRY ME.
ISLE OF—U. (I love you.)

With the help of the names of Mr. Williams who made shaving sticks, and Mr. Brown who made dressing

for ladies' shoes, Bill signed his declaration of love, and blushed as he looked up to the window across the way.

"The boy must be drunk, Mr. Flynn!" exulted Mrs. Malone. "Look how crazy he has posted those signs!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Flynn. "'Tis funny to see a drunken man! But no bill-poster, drunk or sober, can get ahead of Policeman Flynn. Not a word has he had with Mamie, and now that he finds he is beaten, I'll bet he makes himself scarce around here. A little more of that fine grape-juice, if you please, Mrs. Malone."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mamie, above the heads of the startled pair. "Read that sign, Mr. Flynn! Read it, Ma! Hasn't Bill done what he said he would do? Right under Mr. Flynn's eyes he has proposed! There, I knew you would see the joke—it's all right now and I'm coming down—"

"Tee-hee, tee-hee, tee-hee-hee-hee!" gasped Mamie's mother. "Oh, I love a joke, even when it's on me. That boy's no Orangeman, Mame—no Orangeman could get ahead of me like that! Call him over, Mamie, and we will all celebrate the joke with another bottle of my home-made wine. No, I don't mean 'engagement,' either. There's many an engagement, but few enough jokes like this of Bill's."

"A bright boy like that should be on the force," grudged Policeman Flynn.

When the reconciliations and congratulations were over, and Mrs. Malone had gone to spread the news among the neighbors, and Mr. Flynn, all unwittingly, to be rebuked by his captain for an unaccountable unsteadiness of gait, Bill and Mamie sat side by side on the bench under the window and beamed across at the signboard.

"I guess that's the biggest proposal in the country, Bill," said Mamie happily. "I'm glad I'm going to marry such a clever funny fellow. How did you ever think of proposing with a lot of posters, kiddo?"

"Oh, that wasn't clever," answered Bill. "If a man likes his job he can make it say anything."

The Search

BY HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

Out of the archives of the Revenue Department have come many good stories, but none so dramatic and unusual as the tale that follows.

HAT De Lancey had been highly successful in the undertaking which he had described to me when last we parted in New York, seemed clearly proven by the account I had clipped from a New York paper on the second day of July. It read:

MAN ARRESTED IN PARIS.

(*Cable*) Paris: July 1. An American, said to be of French parentage, named E. M. De Lancey, was arrested here today in connection with last night's robbery of Simon et Cie, 14 Rue Royale, in which two of the most well-known diamonds in the world were stolen.

The stones, known as Castor and Pollux to the trade, are similarly cut and weigh eight carats apiece. The total value of the two, considered by English experts to be well over £12,000, is due to the fact that one is a green, and the other a red diamond. Although certain circumstances point to De Lancey's complicity in the crime, the jewels were found neither in his possession nor at his rooms, and since sufficient definite proof in other directions is lacking, the authorities expect to be compelled to release him within a few days.

A few of the people who are known to have been with him the morning after the robbery, are under surveillance, and it is hoped that the stones may ultimately be recovered from one or another of them.

Clever old De Lancey! How invariably he made a success of everything to which he turned his crooked abilities.

As for myself, I had, of course, expected to be of assistance merely in getting the two stones into the hands of old Ranseer at his farm near Morristown, New Jersey, after which, our pay would be forthcoming and would be divided up according to our respective risks in the proceeding. This was the method which we always pursued.

Had the clipping itself, however, been insufficient evidence that De Lancey had again scored one on the French police, his letter, which reached me a week and a half later, made everything clear.

The communication, which was, of course, in cipher, when translated, ran as follows:

Gay Paree, July 4.

T. B.
—— Str.,
New York.

Dear old T. B.:—Was it in the New York papers? Must have been. Pulled it off as slick as the proverbial whistle. The beggars kept me locked up three days, though. But they were shy on proof—and besides, they were too late.

T. B., there is to be a new man, a German, in the crew after this. Never mind where I picked him up. *I firmly believe he is the only man in Europe who will be able to get those gems across the pond.* His name is Von Berghem. He called at my rooms the morning after the *coup*. I passed the stones to him, each one wrapped in a little cotton package and tied with silk thread.

Now, T. B., he's bound for New York, taking the trip across England in easy stages as befits a gentleman travelling for his health, and according to our plans, should embark on an ancient tub named the Princess Dorothy, which leaves Liverpool on July 6th, and arrives at New York nine days later. Immediately upon landing, he will call at your rooms.

As we have already arranged, you will

have two of Ranseer's carrier pigeons (nesting birds, by all means) in a dark covered basket. Secure one stone to each pigeon so that if anything should go wrong, you could liberate them instantly. With their known ability to cover as much as 500 miles, at a speed of 30 miles an hour, they would be able to reach the vicinity of Morristown in less than two hours, even taking into consideration darkness.

As soon as things blow over, yours truly, De Lancey, will slide on toward little old N'Yawk, after which—heigh-ho, boy—the good old white lights and ease for a time.

A last word as to Von Berghem. He wears glasses, has gray hair, and carries a mole on his left cheek. He will be accompanied by his fifteen-year-old son, as sharp a little rascal as ever spotted a Scotland Yard man fifty yards away.

Yours Jubilantly,
De L.

So Von Berghem seemed to be the only man in Europe who could get those two sparklers across the pond?

Surely, if he had to get them out of Europe before the eyes of the police, and get them into the States before the eyes of the custom authorities, he would have to be sharp indeed, especially in view of the fact that a hue and cry had already been raised.

Everything was in readiness. The pigeons were cheeping in their covered basket. On the mantel were two small leather leg bags ready for the loot. I looked at my watch and found that it was after nine o'clock.

Strange that Von Berghem had not arrived. I had called the steamship offices by telephone at six o'clock and had learned that the Princess Dorothy had docked an hour before.

Then I fell to wondering why he had encumbered himself with his son. Unquestionably, he must have realized that in dealings such as ours, every extra man, constituting a possible weak link, meant just so much more chance of failure.

The clock struck ten.

Where had De Lancey found this fellow—this Von Berghem? Was he sure of him? Did he understand the game as we did?

Everything that De Lancey did was perplexing. He seemed to know every crook between the equator and the poles and to understand just what part to assign him in any of our undertakings. Without doubt, he must have known what he was doing this time.

So he was the only man that De Lancey believed capable of—

The clock struck ten-thirty.

I heard the slam of a taxi-cab door down on the street below.

A second later, the bell of my apartment tinkled sharply.

I hurried to the front door and opened it quietly. In the outer hall stood a tall man wearing glasses. He had gray hair—and a mole on his left cheek. At his side was a boy of about sixteen.

"This is T. B.," I whispered.

"Von Berghem," he answered, and stepped inside with the boy, while I closed the door behind them.

I passed down the narrow inner hall and threw open the library door. "In here," I said, and snapped on the lights. "How did you make out?"

Von Berghem seemed to be ill. The whiteness of his face and his halting gait, as he leaned heavily on the shoulder of his son, signified either sickness or—

Failure! Ah—that must be it. My heart seemed to stop beating. Von Berghem must have been unsuccessful in his mission.

He sank heavily into a chair that the boy brought forth for him. The

latter dropped down on a small footstool, nearby, and remained silent.

In the interval, I studied Von Berghem and perceived for the first time, the horrible expression on his face. His eyes had the same haunting look that I had once seen on the face of a maniac in the state insane asylum.

"Met with considerable trouble," he stated laconically, after a pause.

"Tell me about it," I said, half sympathetically and half suspiciously. His gaze, which had been roving aimlessly around the room, he directed toward me again. Then he commenced to talk.

"I called on De Lancey the morning after the robbery. He gave the two gems into my keeping at once. The lad was with me. He's a coming thief, is the lad. We took a cab at once for the station. Three hours afterward, De Lancey was nabbed.

"The lad and I boarded a train that morning for Calais. We reached there at one o'clock in the afternoon and spent the rest of the day in a hotel. From the hotel we made the boat safely that evening and got into Dover at midnight. So far, everything ran without a hitch. We stayed at a boarding house in Dover till morning.

"No use to bore you telling you of our crawling progress across England. Only three hundred miles, but we spent four days covering it. Of course, we were just a gentleman and his son travelling for pleasure.

"But things began to liven up for us. We had hoped by this time that we were not being looked for after all, but apparently we were wrong. As we got off the train in the station at Liverpool, on the evening of July 5th, the lad, little lynx that he is, spots a man in a brown suit, carelessly watching all the passengers. He nudges me quickly.

"Now comes luck itself. A crazy emigrant, farther down the platform, pulls out a gun and commences shooting through the roof. Hell and confusion break loose. During the big rush of people that takes place, the lad notices a little door leading out to a side street. 'Quick, Daddy,' he says, 'we'll slip out this way.'

"Outside, he flags a cabby in a jiffy and we drive to a little dirty hotel on a side street, where we spend the night, wondering whether the man in the brown suit was looking for us or for someone else.

"However, we're on our guard now. We don't feel quite so easy. Next morning we make the pier and board the Princess Dorothy, which boat, I may add, is one of the few that do not touch at Queenstown or any other point but New York, once she leaves Liverpool. Yes, friend T. B., every detail was figured out long in advance by De Lancey himself.

"As soon as we get aboard, I lie down in the stateroom and let the lad remain on deck. I'm not a well man, friend T. B., and travelling under the conditions and handicaps that we travelled under, is hard on me. The following is the boy's account.

"As he says: No sooner had the ship pulled out from the docks and was headed about for the open water, than a motor car comes rushing pell-mell, up to the landing. Out jump four men—and one of 'em is our friend in the brown suit. The lad whips out the

binoculars and watches their lips. 'Damn—too late—wireless—' is what our brown-suited near-acquaintance appears to say.

"Well, in spite of the fact that we're equipped with wireless nothing happens to us on the boat. But at no time do I forget the existence of the Atlantic Cable. All the way across I take my meals in the stateroom and the lad prowls around deck trying to pick up some information. But, as I said before, everything's as peaceful as the grave.

"It's a mighty long nine days for us, friend T. B., but late in the afternoon of the fifteenth, we find we're within one hour of the Battery —and we realize now that things are very doubtful for us.

"As we step from the gangplank together, each of us suddenly finds a hand on our shoulder. In front of us stand three men, two of 'em fly-bulls with stars—the third a customs inspector. 'You're Von Berghem,' says one of 'em. 'Want you both to step in this little house at the end of the pier for a couple o' hours. When we get done there won't be any need of a customs inspection, for the inspector himself, here, is going to help us out.' He laughed unpleasantly. 'Yep —we got a warrant,' adds the other in answer to my unspoken question.

"Well, my friend, I, Von Berghem, know my limitations. I didn't take the trouble to deny anything. Smilingly, I admitted that I was Von Berghem and that this was my son. Then I asked them what they intended to do. 'Just want to look you and your boy and your two suitcases over,' admits one of them.

"In that little inspection house they locked the door. They drew down the shades and turned on the lights. They commanded us both to strip. When we had done this, they made us stand stark naked up against the wall. They began by examining our mouths, taking good care to look under our tongues. Then they combed out our hair with a fine-tooth comb. After a full fifteen minutes, in which they satisfied themselves that the jewels were not concealed on our bodies, they started on our luggage. 'This is an outrage,' I grumbled.

"They dumped out the clothing in our suitcases and placed it in one pile, together with that which we had been forced to discard. Then they commenced with our underclothing, which they examined seam by seam, button by button, square inch by square inch. Following that, our garters, our socks, our suspenders, were subjected to the same rigid examination.

"As fast as they finished with an article of clothing, they tossed it over to us and allowed whichever one of us was the owner, to don it. In that way, we dressed, garment by garment, always protesting stoutly at the outrage.

"In the same manner they went through our neckties, most of which they ripped open; our shirts, collars, and vests followed next.

"When they came to our outer suits, not content with an exacting scrutiny, they brought out hammers and hammered every inch. Our shoes—look for yourself, friend T. B.—are without heels; they tore them off, layer by layer. Our felt hats underwent

similar treatment, for they removed the linings, replacing them later, loose.

"Our suitcases were examined at buckle and seam, rivet and strap. At every place of possible concealment they pounded vigorously with their hammers, using enough force to smash steel balls, let alone brittle diamonds.

"Friend T. B., we were in there three and a half hours, and had we had trunks, we might have been there yet. They left nothing unturned. Everything, though, has to come to an end. In disgust, they finally threw away their hammers. 'That lead from Liverpool's a phoney one,' said one of the three to the two others. 'You're free, Von Berghem and son,' his companion added. 'It's a cinch you've not got the proceeds of the Simon Company's burglary at Paris. You and your boy can go.'

"This was about two hours ago. We have had no supper for we took a taxi-cab and, with the exception of a couple of breakdowns on the way, came straight here in order to tell you of the situation in which we found ourselves."

I was very bitterly disappointed. And I told Von Berghem so.

"It's a shame," I said. "De Lancey stakes his liberty on a bit of clever work—and then sends a bungler across with the proceeds. Of course, man, they've got 'em by this time. It doesn't matter where in the stateroom you hid 'em—the woodwork, the carpet, the mattress,—they've found 'em now. Well—we'll have to put it down as a failure—that's all."

He heard me through before he uttered a word. Then, dropping his glasses in his coat pocket, he answered me sharply:

"Failure? Who has said anything of failure? You do me a great injustice, friend T. B. Von Berghem never fails. Look!"

He pressed his hands to his face. For a moment, I thought he was going to weep, for he made strange clawing motions with his fingers. Then he lowered his hands.

I sprang to my feet, suppressing a cry with difficulty. Where his eyes had been, were now black, sightless sockets. On each of his palms lay a fragile, painted, porcelain shell—and in the hollow of each shell was a tiny cotton packet, tied with silk thread.

Scat

BY ABIGAIL WILLIAMS BURTON

By the will of a cat-loving aunt, a young man is left his deceased aunt's estate with the proviso that he will take care of his aunt's pet cat and endow a home for stray felines. The young man earned his money.

JR "new thought" epigrammatists remark to a suffering world that pain is friendly. As I sat there in the carriage, I found this observation profoundly true. For was it not due to a kindly pneumonia that I was accompanying my Great-aunt Tabitha to the cemetery?

As we passed cheerfully along, the *click-clack* of the horses' hoofs suggested the jingling of golden coins tumbling into my pocket. Before my eye, rolled endless wheels of shining, glittering dollars, that changed in a twinkling to motor cars and clubs and costly food.

So it was not strange that I decided upon a merry little meal, at a merry little place, in honor of Aunt Tabitha's entrance upon her new sphere of activity. As I gave the order to the driver, I seemed to hear my aunt murmur pleasantly that she would pay the bill.

The evening was a great success. Indifferently, I saw my week's salary shrink to the pigmy proportions of a single dollar. I heard again that reassuring whisper, and informed my landlady that she might move my belongings from the fourth floor rear to the spacious first floor front.

Obedient once more to the heavenly voice, I stopped at a fashionable tailor's and gave orders for a suit—the first correct suit of my life. In deference to my aunt, I chose something in black and white. The check was large. For what use? I asked myself. If I took things too seriously, it might as well have been my funeral as Aunt Tabitha's.

The rest of the week passed in a golden dream. I indulged myself in many pretty whimseys that fate had heretofore denied. When Saturday came, I repaired to my aunt's lawyer. I prided myself on correct business principles, and thought happily of paying the debts so delightfully incurred. Moreover—I confess it freely—I longed to sign my name to my first check. How often had I practiced the curves of those proud letters, that my signature might have the dash befitting the representative of so many thousands!

"To my grand-nephew, Alabaster Brown, in appreciation of his untiring devotion, I give and bequeath my dearest possession, Scatter Sunshine, together with such means as shall be needful to keep said Scatter Sunshine in best of health and spirits, as long as said Scatter Sunshine shall live. And at his death, my entire fortune shall be given unreservedly to the establishment and maintainance of a home for worthy felines, to be called 'The Scatter Sunshine Home.'"

The lawyer's voice droned on, but I heard no more. So this was the end

of all my striving! For this I had endured my aunt's shrewish temper, her dyspeptic table, her accursed cat!

"As to the animal," the lawyer was saying, "it will be delivered at your address—"

"Not on its whole nine lives!" I shouted. "You can't wish the monster on me!"

"According to the terms of the will," returned the lawyer crisply, "I have no other course."

I seized the paper. As I read, the cloud lost its blackness; about the edges a golden lining peeped. I drew a deep breath. I even smiled.

"Very good. My dear aunt's wish is law. I shall endeavor to surround the cat with every comfort. Perhaps you had better advance a few dollars —a hundred will do."

The lawyer glanced at me sharply. "As you wish. At the first of the month bring your charge to the office with an itemized list of his—ah—expenses."

I pocketed the check and turned pensively home. In the hall, my excellent landlady met me with the remark that there was a package. "And behaving something terrible, it is," she added darkly.

"Do not worry, Mrs. Peebles," said I cheerfully. "It is scattering sunshine!"

My landlady tossed her head and followed me into the room. She waited, glowering with suspicion, while I cautiously uncovered the basket. My ward and I stood face to face. He hunched promptly into his accustomed attitude and spat out a long and malevolent hiss. Had his body equalled his spirit, how cheerfully would he have eaten me! My landlady hastily removed her glowering from heir to heirloom.

"What will you do with that—that—"

"That Scat?" I finished lightly. "I shall make him the ornament of my hearth, my lares and penates. I shall encourage him to live out every one of his nine lives. That cat," I ended impressively, "must outlive me!"

"Not in my house!" declared the irate Mrs. Peebles.

"In your house, I believe," said I firmly. "My dear Mrs. Peebles, let me explain."

Whereupon, I showed her a copy of my late revered aunt's will, together with my check, and hinted discreetly what Scat would be willing to pay for her ministrations. The change in the woman was magical. She approved voluably. Her very apron strings were eloquent!

So began the domestic life of myself and my Aunt Tabitha's legacy. On my part it was care, encouragement, solicitude; on the part of the legacy it was indifference, thanklessness, perversity. I purchased expensive foods; Scat curled his whiskers disdainfully and perferred milk. I tempted him with graceful meerchaums; Scat humped himself upon the table and left the smoking to me. I even bought theatre tickets and arranged little suppers with a dash of champagne; Scat never indulged.

Always I made it a point to talk things over with him. He would listen, with the well-known consent of silence. Yet, when the moment came, he would look on sleepily as I dressed, turning a deaf ear to my entreaties.

Thinking to improve Scat's social position, I dressed well, joined several clubs, and won a reputation for spending with distinction. But though my tastes improved, Scat's did not. Though I became aristocratic, Scat remained hopelessly plebeian. Not a trace of improvement was there since that first far day when he stood upon my aunt's hearth rug, buff colored, gaunt, his fur bitten out in spots, his tail bunched and twisted, and his red eyes gleaming sardonically.

In one matter only, did our tastes agree—our distastes, rather—for a sore trial to us both was the monthly trip to the lawyer's. My cat in a bag and my bill in my pocket, I would present myself for inspection and imbursement. The lawyer would glance at Scat, remark that he appeared as usual, and receive the bill. This he would peruse in leisurely silence, at times reading aloud some such items as:

1 box Havanas	$8.00

or perhaps a group of items like this:

Tango pumps	$7.50
Orchids	10.00
Taxi	4.35

Then he would raise his eyebrows and look at me for an explanation. I would be stroking my pet, getting in a dab between scratches, and remarking:

"Hey! Didn't you know? Went back on your old pal and made him hunt up another partner!"

"So his share was staying at home?"

"Was giving me a deuce of a chase among these infernal areas!"

"Ha! And the Havanas?"

"Turns up his nose at 'em! Will you indulge?"

The cigar had a tranquillizing effect.

"You say these expenses were incurred for the betterment of your ward?"

"Judge for yourself! When I have no cigar, I am peevish. When I stay at home, Scat mopes in his basket."

Then the lawyer would draw up the check remarking:

"His tastes are expensive."

"Due solely to my Aunt Tabitha's will, I assure you!"

Alas! Not always did our interviews end so pleasantly! It chanced, one day, that I had planned a theatre party, but had forgotten to engage seats. The lawyer was more fussy than usual. Not an item on the bill that he did not question! When the check was finally written, I caught it up and rushed away. It was not until the tickets were secured and I was at my desk that I remembered Scat. Shades of Aunt Tabitha. I had left him at the lawyer's!

It was already late. If I went for Scat, I should miss my appointment. Nothing for it but to press the office boy into service. I explained the delicacy of his errand—he must not allow the lawyer to imagine Scat was lost, but must recover the creature by guile. I emphasized my words with a five dollar bill, promised him another when his errand was done, and bade him Scatspeed.

The boy departed blithely. He reached the office and inquired for the package left by Mr. Brown. No one had seen any package! But the boy was determined. Searching halls and stairways, he came upon a lank monster. Scat! In an instant the boy had pounced, plunged his prize into

a bag, and borne him to my house. There revenge got the better of avarice. The young imp tied the bag with its kicking victim to my door knob, gave the package a swinging slap and departed, well pleased, nursing his scratched fingers.

When at midnight I let myself in with my latch-key, there was a rush of something soft past my legs. I switched on the lights, but the creature, whatever it was, had disappeared. At the door of my room something dangled from the knob—an empty bag. What tomcattery was this?

My first concern was Scat. His basket was empty. So was the room. Didn't I always have to rout him out of the basement where he burrowed like some tenacious vegetable, loath to leave its soil? But in vain I searched the coal bin, the areas, the musty, mousy haunts. No cat!

Then I remembered the soft rush of something past my legs. Gone! Lost! Scat!

Pursuit was impossible. The night was as black as the soul of that abandoned office boy. And without Scat, what? Who was to pay for the merry indebtedness of the evening?

Box at theatre	$12.00
Supper	17.50
Tips	2.25

Thirty-five dollars to be dug up by somebody! And that bill at the tailor's, forgotten last month—and—

Dawn rescued me from these details. Aided by the anxious Mrs. Peebles, I scoured the neighborhood. In vain! At the office I poured out my wrath upon the boy. He protested innocence. Was it his fault if I went and left the scatty out? He had done his part; now let me do mine with that other fiver. He indulged in derision: Who'd want the old scarecrow anyhow? Skinny black thing—"

"Black? What?"

"The cat, o' course."

"Black nothing. It was yellow!"

"Shut your eye! It was black like your shoe—black as my hand!"

The shoe needed polish, but the hand was convincing. So the boy had caught not Scat, but another. And my charge—perhaps he had followed me from the lawyer's, only to lose himself in the maze of the city. He must be found!

I rose early and questioned the butcher, the baker, the wienewurst maker, the fur man, the glove man—never a Scat had they seen!

The first of the month drew near. At the lawyer's, I knew it was no beast, no feast. I had an inspiration. Scat was ill—a cold; pneumonia perhaps. Seizing my book with its record of the fatal theatre party, I wrote down quickly:

Medical advice	$12.00
Trained nurse	17.50
Diet	2.25

So far, so good. But what of my other expenses? A man must live. At one desperate leap I cleared the difficulty and added:

Catnip tea	$76.00

Armed with this slip, I presented myself before the lawyer. He expressed no surprise at Scat's non-appearance. Indeed, I fancied a crafty smile curved his lips. My list he read with leisurely amusement.

"Less catnip tea and more diet," he observed, "might hasten your

valued ward's recovery."

Recovery! The word had an ominous ring!

"A just criticism," I returned, and taking out my pencil, I transposed the two items, thus:

Diet	$76.00
Catnip tea	2.25

Again he read, and again he smiled satirically.

"Much better," he pronounced. "When your ward is *recovered*"—again that unpleasant stress on the word!—"bring him with you, and we will consider the bill. Till then, my dear sir—"

A wave of the hand, and I was dismissed!

So the case stood: no ward, no board! Clearly the old fox suspected something!

Without delay, I wrote the following advertisement:

WANTED: Any old yellowish cat, coat patched, tail twisted. Will pay large sum, if sufficiently decrepit.

That should bring some sort of a Scat. And I waited.

By one o'clock, the first edition was on the street. By one-fifteen, the telephone rang—Mrs. Peebles. Some boys had arrived with cats. Scat? They wouldn't show her. Yes, she would have them wait.

At one-thirty, Mrs. Peebles again. Place over-run with people. Steps full. Scat? She couldn't say. Had seen some black and white ones. No, she couldn't send *any* of 'em away. They wouldn't *go!*

At two o'clock, they were lining up along the sidewalks, both ways. The noise was awful. For heaven's sake, hurry!

I hurried. Scat, I told myself, was waiting to greet me with a hiss. Many were called, and one was to be chosen. And that one, henceforth, should be my Scat and my legacy, now and forever, one and inseparable.

The street was indeed blocked, the sidewalks thronged, the steps crowded. And hugged inside of jacket or shawl, every man, woman, or child, clutched a scratching, spitting, writhing, howling horror. White, black, maltese, tiger—but one word of my description had any one regarded, and that word was "decrepit." I had asked for a cat, I endured a cataclysm!

Up the steps I struggled. Fearfully, Mrs. Peebles undid the door. I turned and waved my arm over the throng.

"Take 'em away! Wrong size, wrong color, wrong everything!"

I dodged just in time to avoid a cat flung at my head. Two mangy brutes struck the carpet beside me. A third fastened its claws to my coat and rode in. A fourth arrived—all but his tail, that remained in the door, amid horrible yowling. To save our ears, we admitted it also.

From the window we saw a wrathful multitude loosing cats over the place, chasing them down areas, over ledges, up rainpipes. The walls dripped cats, the walks were paved with them, the gutters swam. It was not till the mob was dispersed by policemen, that we ventured to drive out the four intruders. Three were ejected. The fourth was found in Scat's basket! a gaunt buffish creature that stared at us out of baleful eyes. Dumped upon the floor, he stood humping and spitting. More patched

than usual, more lean and hungry. The prodigal returned!

"The dear creature!" exclaimed Mrs. Peebles, with a gush of ready tears. "The dear, sweet creature!"

However, Mrs. Peebles was no doubt thinking of the dear tea and sweet sugar and other creature comforts that Scat represented.

A ring at the bell, a parley, and a man was admitted,—a small man with a suitcase and a hunted look.

"About that cat of yours," he began thickly. "I've got it right here in this bag—"

"No, you haven't," I interrupted satirically.

"Wait!" he pleaded. "I'm an innocent mortal, living peaceable with all men, till last month our neighbor goes and brings home this cat!"

He shook the suitcase savagely. There came a whirring, threatening sound—

"That's no cat!" I shouted. "That's dynamite!"

"Dynamite be blowed," he answered hoarsely. "It's an infernal machine all right—"

"Don't give it to me," was my hot rejoinder. "I'm running a little purgatory of my own!"

"So I hear," he cried eagerly. "That's just it. With so many, one more can't make any difference. Here's ten dollars, if you'll take it."

Without waiting for consent, he shook out the contents of the suitcase, dropped the bill, and bolted.

"Confound you!" I cried—and stopped. The cat that rose from the floor, was gaunt, yellow, ragged, blotched, bristling! The cat in the basket was an excellent understudy. Even his tail was barnacled—the front door had seen to that. But this was the genuine Scat—the incomparable he!

"It's his very spitting image," cried Mrs. Peebles, delighted. "And if one of 'em dies, sir, which to be sure, is but natural, there's the other to keep on collecting your money!"

Two Scats for one! Mrs. Peebles spoke truth.

"Ain't it pretty to hear him growling again, the lamb?" murmured the good lady.

"Very pretty," I agreed.

With lively disfavor, the future messmates regarded each other. Lashing his tail, Scat announced that the basket was his. By the same token, Scattish replied that possession was nine points of the claw. Scat snarled that they would see about that. Scattish growled that they would. And they did! In the debate, both lost more fur than they could well spare for sweet decency's sake. A truce was called and the combatants bundled off to the coal bin, while we engaged in shooing cats away from the windows, shaking them off the screens, chasing them from the area, to fence, to roof, to tree, till darkness fell, shutting the invaders from sight.

But not from sound! In the coal bin our two choice spirits clawed and caterwauled the wild night through, with ringing accompaniment from fence and roof and tree. By morning, Mrs. Peebles had an inspiration. The fire department arrived, with laughter and with hose, and washed away our tormentors. So peace descended as far as the coal bin.

But the end of the advertisement

was not yet. Night after night, our bell was rung by low-voiced, suffering men, who carried basket or box or wriggling bag, and who besought me with bribes to take their spoil. So I found myself a fence for stolen cats!

On the other hand, my good landlady, who watched the "Lost" ads, met by day a procession of bereaved spinsters. These crossed her palm with silver, received their dear estrays, and went rejoicing home.

Near the end of the month, I noticed a new advertisement. Some one had lost a cat—and the initials were those of my aunt's lawyer! Then at last Scat's disappearance was explained. The old tightwad had refused to give my cat to the office boy, had taken it home, only to have it stolen by a desperate neighbor, who had brought it to me! I determined to get even with that lawyer.

On the first of the month, Mrs. Peebles, armed with Scattish the Spurious, betook herself to the lawyer's office. She deposited her cat, pocketed her fee, and rejoined me, waiting outside. A moment later, I entered with Scat the Genuine.

The lawyer's jaw dropped.

"Curious! Curious!" he muttered.

"Curious indeed," said I sternly. "For instance, this clipping." I laid his "ad" on the table, "and this fee," I produced the gold piece, "and this cat!" From the wastebasket, I fished by the tail, the indignant Scattish.

Face to face on the legal tilting field, the messmates at once presented paws. The lawyer turned red, gasped, and for the first time in his career, found nothing to say. At a sign, Mrs. Peebles entered. Coldly I stated my charge; the excellent woman nodded in confirmation. I finished. Mrs. Peebles recovered the gold piece. The lawyer walked up and down.

"See here," he cried, stopping suddenly, "the whole thing's absurd. All that income for a cat! Now listen! You're both sensible people. Let's wring the neck of this imposter here, of that bonafide fellow there. What's to hinder our forming ourselves into a home for indigent cats, according to the terms of your late aunt's will? You, Mr. Brown, can be president, I'll be secretary and treasurer, and this lady will make an admirable matron. As president," he added thoughtfully, "you can command a salary of, say, four hundred a month."

"And you?" I questioned.

"One hundred might not be unreasonable. And the matron, seventy-five."

Mrs. Peebles leaned forward. "We're a home for cats already," she urged. "We could put the dear creatures back in the coal bin, sir, and enjoy our reward handsome! I'm sure our experience with Scatter Sunshine makes it certain your Aunt Tabitha's idea of a home for cats will be developed as she would have wished. I'll go now for some choloroform and—"

"You will do nothing of the sort," I declared. "Scatter Sunshine will live as long as nine lives will carry him."

I grabbed up Aunt Tabitha's pet and left the plotters to console one another. For I remembered that Scatter Sunshine smoked excellent Havanas!

loved me them days, Suella! God! I'd give all th' money I ever spec' to have, to have 'em back!"

"Yo' think hit's my fault, Tom?" she asked, mechanically placing the scentless blossoms to her nostrils.

A shadow crossed the man's face. He drew down his lower lip in a peculiar expression, which showed his set teeth.

"I wush I knowed," he said, simply, absently picking a hole in the sandy soil with his long brown fingers.

Again the girl glanced over the barrier. Far down the creek, coming at a walk over the shale of the slatey bed, was a mule and a man. The test moment had come. The hour for which she had been waiting, and seeking, and planning, had rolled around at last. For an enduring flame of relentless hate had burned about the primitive heart of Suella Porn since that night when a man she abhorred had crushed her roughly to him and bruised her lips with his mad caresses. What fool idea was this which possessed Tom Medrow? No one had seen the shooting of the dog. Doubtless it was a plot of Dade's to get a hold on his rival!

Subdued excitement had placed a rose in each olive cheek and an added sparkle in her great black eyes as she turned again to Tom. His head was still bent and he was plucking abstractedly at the ground.

Sinuously she slid toward him, and instantly was by his side, resting upon one hip and her spread palms.

Medrow looked up—to suck in his breath with a surprised heave.

"Chris' in heav'n, Suella! Whut is it?" he exclaimed, the while his rushing blood deepened the color in his face and his eyes traveled over her in distressed uncertainty.

"We've fooled 'bout this long 'nough, Tom," she said, putting her face forward and holding his puzzled but burning eyes. "Hit's come to this. Air yo' gunta stick furever to that crazy notion 'bout owin' that man his life 'cause yo' think he saved Janey's? Is that notion preciouser to yo' than me? Is it wuth mo' than me? Answer me, Tom, 'n' answer quick! Hit 'r me?"

She drew herself yet closer to him, never shifting her eyes. Her foot touched his—glided over it, and Suella exulted in her soul when she saw a corresponding shiver vibrate all through the man before her. Then she smiled at him. With the lips he had not touched since he came home; the lips which another had dishonored and which he had failed to avenge, she smiled, and waited.

Tom seemed paralyzed, but she knew the awful fight going on within his brain and she thought she knew how it would end. His dazed look of non-comprehension gave place to one of intense desire. It appeared as if he was trying to hold himself from her, for his body drew together and he was shaking, while his face was twisted oddly.

"Hit 'r me! Hit 'r me!" Suella purred. "Quick, Tom, do yo' love me?"

She flung one arm across his shoulder in a passionate gesture and threw up her chin, charming him to her will through slits of eyelids.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 52]

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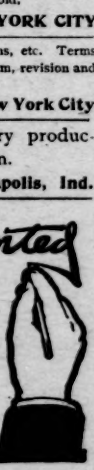

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He cast himself toward her, then with a moaning cry, gathered her to him, muttering some disjointed prayer for God's mercy.

Suella deftly twisted her mouth away from his eager, starved lips.

"Hit's me then, Tom? Hit's me?" she whispered, pressing closer to him.

"Yes, hit's you! Ef I burn in hell furever!"

"Yo' wanter kiss me, Tom, lak yo' useter?" she cooed, nestling in his arms with a quick sigh.

"Yo' lips, gel! Fur God's sake, yo' lips!" he pleaded; "yo' lips!"

With that she drew swiftly back and caught his eyes again. They were red-veined now.

"They're your'n, Tom, when yo've won yo' right to 'em!" she said. "Quint Dade's a-rid'n' up th' crick. I seen 'im a minute ago—thur's yo' gun!"

In the absolute silence which followed, came the rustling clatter of the shale under the mule's leisurely moving hoofs.

With dismay, Suella saw that the man was hesitating. A stubborn frown had sprung to his forehead and he was drawing his hand across his eyes in a confused, doubting way. She must win! She *must!* Three minutes more it would be too late.

Deftly she loosed the masses of her hair and let it fall streaming about her. Then, with love-words on her tongue, she cast her arms about Tom's neck. She kissed him. She pleaded with him. She fondled him with voice and touch. She drew him almost bodily to the stone rampart and thrust the weapon into his hands. With her arms around his waist, holding him tightly, she knelt and saw him train the rifle.

Crowding its report came the rattle of frightened hoofs, and a riderless mule went galloping by.

But neither saw.

Now that her will at last was done, Suella was the tender sweetheart of old. With sobbing laughter she fell upon Tom's breast and thrust her hand down the collar of his shirt.

"Take me home, boy!" she murmured; "I'm your'n now!"

"Yo're wuth whut I done," he answered, soberly. "Th' ol' law's bes' fur us!"

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gins to steal up the flat and sandy bottom o' the valley, always keepin' behind clumps o' scrub as well as he can, and makin' no more noise than his own shadow. Sure enough, he finds the old hut; and, standin' close to it, he sees a dark splotch which he knows to be a saddled and ready buckskin pony. And he soon draws near enough to see that the stirrups o' the bespangled Mexican saddle is short and suited to a person of low stature.

Stape creeps on his hands and knees to a rock big enough to shelter him, and sings out cautious like:

"Oh, Bill!"

He sure don't have to wait long. As soon as that young composite edition de luxe is good and awake, he seems to realize that no enemy would call to him open like that. He sneaks to the doorway with a ready gun in each hand, and asks what's wanted.

"Be careful with the gats, Bill," says Stape, showin' no part of himself. "I'm the sheriff o' this county, but I'm on a friendly mission. I've got something important to tell you. I'll walk to you with my hands up, so you'll know you ain't bein' fooled. You're in the dark, and I ain't."

"Now I ain't anxious to attend my own funeral," says Baby Bill, in a voice that belies his looks, easy. "What's the trick—who's with you?"

"No trick at all, Bill," says Stape. "I'm givin' it to you straight."

"Then come on," says Baby Bill. "And I'll keep you covered, and if anything happens I'll shoot you. That's correct, Sheriff."

Stape gets up with his hands raised and walks to the doorway, where he stops and rests his hands on the door casin'.

"Tell it—get it out o' your system," snaps Baby Bill from the dark interior o' the hut. "And don't you try to trick me."

Stape's senses cleared enough to see that it was better for all parties concerned for Alice and Willie not to meet at all. He decides that he can transact the business he's come to transact without the help of Alice.

"Bill," he says, "if you had a chance to sneak out o' the country and go to New York, would you take it?"

"Sure!" says Baby Bill.

"And would quit your badness, and live a square life there?"

"Sure!"

"Then," Stape goes on, "you're goin' to get the chance. Behind that rock I was hid behind when I called to you, you'll find women's clothes and a shawl for your head. Go to Watkins's Tank and get on the midnight train tomorrow night. Nobody'll know you from any common sunburnt girl. And after you get to New York, you live straight."

"Bring them female duds here and let me see 'em," says Baby Bill.

Stape does as he's asked.

"Goodbye, and much obliged," says the kid outlaw.

"Don't be seen anywhere tomorrow," says Stape. "Goodbye!"

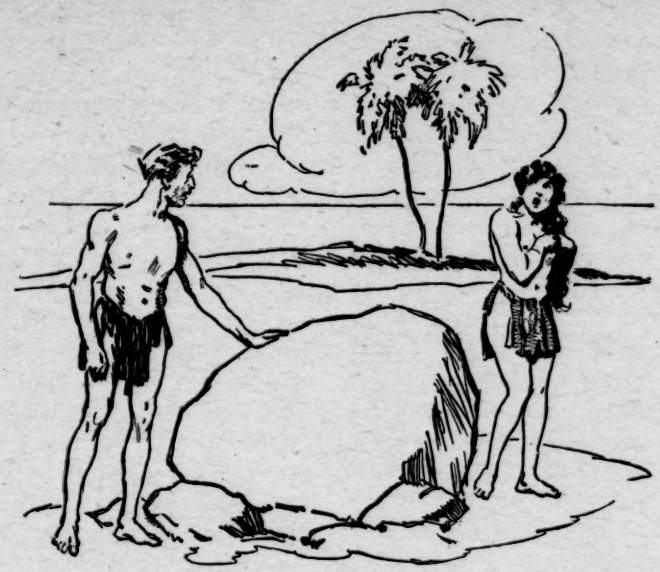
Stape goes back to the girl and the two hosses.

"It's all right, Alice," says he.

"But I did so want to see him once more," says Alice.

Before they reached town, Stape was feelin' like a combination of

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 56]



Neither ever saw a human being before!

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Judas, coyote, and graverobber. Suddenly he turns to Alice.

"Little girl," says he, "I can't stand this breakin' my oath and profitin' by it. Willie will be on the midnight train tomorrow night, as I told you. You'll be on the same train. You'll go back home with him, and marry him. It's the only salve I know for my conscience."

Alice catches up his big brown hand and kisses it, impulsive like.

Stape goes with Alice to the train the next night. Just as he is in the act o' buyin' her a ticket to New York, a cowman rides into San Macati and begins to yell for the sheriff! Stape passes the girl's money back to her, and runs out and stops the cowman.

"Baby Bill has shot and killed old man Duggar o' the Double-X!" says the cowman. "Robbed him and then shot and killed him!"

"When was it—and maybe it wasn't Baby Bill?" says Alice, who has come up.

"It happened about sundown," says the cowman. "And it was Baby Bill—for nobody else could pull off the stunt he did. He had on dresses, with a shawl over his head."

"Heaven have mercy," cries Alice McBride, and faints away.

"Take her to the hotel over there," orders Stape.

The cowman obeys, and Stape gets together plenty of ammunition, water and grub, gets on his hoss, and rides toward the hills.

He was gone four days. When he got back he went straight to his little office, sat down at his homemade desk, and begun to write off a sort of a report. Before he had signed his name to it, the door opened, and in walked Alice McBride. Stape didn't look around; he knowed by her step that it was her. And Stape begins to stare through his desk and forty miles out into the hills, where, under a mesquite cross, there lays the rest of him who styled himself Baby Bill.

Then, to Stape's surprise, Alice pulls him straight up in his chair, and smiles down into his face. And Stape looks at her, and is reminded of a full-blown rose in June.

"Stape, honey," she says, "I want you to take me to the justice and marry me right now. Because I can't go back to old Manhat now that I know you. And, Stape, listen—I jumped at a conclusion. Baby Bill wasn't Willie Cartwright, at all! Willie Cartwright passed through San Macati day before yesterday—and, the coward, the sneak, the puppy, he was peddlin' safety appliances for the household—yes, sir, safety razors, safety potato slicers, and safety pins!"

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net without hesitation. Almost immediately, those outside heard the bell ring three times, and a moment later, Bailey emerged laughing, but with an expression of relief on his face.

"Nothing doing," he cried jocularly. "It didn't even nab me on that melon deal!"

"We're after the man who stole those papers," returned Mystero dryly, as he handed Bailey a fresh towel. "Who is the next man?"

One after another, the sitters came forward, had the sleevelet adjusted and went through the formula of ringing the bell in the alligator's throat. When the last man emerged from the cabinet without having had his arm crushed in the jaws of the monster, the sitters were laughing sarcastically. They were by now quite convinced that Mystero had been merely trying to bluff them. Mr. Wheeler's expression showed both chagrin and disappointment.

"You're a peach of a medium, you are," jeered Bailey.

"Thank you," returned Mystero, bowing low. "I am considered the best in my class, and have never been known to fail in any undertaking I went into seriously."

"You fell down hard this trip," scoffed the other.

"Who? I? What makes you think that? I assure you that I am more than satisfied with the results."

"Humph! Your old alligator didn't nab the thief!"

"It most certainly did! Nabbed him good and hard!" retorted the medium.

"Nabbed who?" gasped Bailey.

"*You!*" Mystero shot the answer at him with such force that Bailey dodged. For a moment, the man was too startled to speak, and then his face flushed angrily and he sprang up threateningly.

"See here, fellow, have a care who you are accusing of stealing those papers," he growled. "You haven't the slightest foundation for the assertion you just made, but you picked me out for the goat and tried to startle me into an admission of guilt. You can either take back what you said here and now, or I'll give you the chance to explain yourself in the police court!"

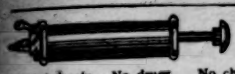
"Perhaps I did speak too hastily," said Mystero apologetically, "and, of course, there is always a chance for a mistake. If I have done so, I most humbly beg your pardon, and in order to set matters right with the others, I'll make a full confession of the ruse I have attempted to carry out. Will that be satisfactory, Mr. Bailey?"

"It will if it explains," growled the other surlily, as he resumed his seat. In spite of his bluster, the man seemed to have become suddenly uneasy; he clasped his hands, rubbing them together nervously, and shifted about in his chair.

Mystero stepped before his audience and drew from his coat pocket a small tin box. Gingerly removing the cover, he held the box before the sitters for inspection. It contained a number of small pods coated with a yellow wooly substance.

"These, gentlemen, are seed pods of the *mucuna pruriens*, a creeping vine indigenous to tropical South America, and commonly known as the 'buffalo

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 60]



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bean.' You will note that the pods have a fuzzy appearance, which is due to a coating of thousands of almost invisible hairs. These hairs have a medicinal value and can be purchased at any drug store under the name of 'cowhage.' They become detached from the pods at the slightest disturbance, and are so fine and light that they float about in the air, and when they come in contact with the bare skin they excite the most intense itching and irritations."

Mystero carefully replaced the cover on the box and returned it to his pocket.

"Gentlemen, when I placed that sleevelet on your arm and requested you to dip your hand into the magic water, which is, by the way, nothing but a soapy mixture which makes the hand temporarily impervious to the action of the cowhage, it was for the sole purpose of protecting your hand from direct contact with the pods, a number of which I had placed in the throat of the alligator.

"I led you all to think that there was some connection between this water and the closing of the alligator's jaws; I led you to believe that a combination of the two was necessary in order that the test might be successful. What was more natural than for the guilty man to conceive the brilliant notion of inserting his left hand into the mouth of the alligator in order to ring the bell, instead of using his right hand, thereby frustrating my scheme.

"This is exactly what happened. For the past few minutes, our friend, Mr. Bailey, has been suffering the most exquisite torture in his left hand, which he is even now frantically rubbing. You will notice that it is red and inflamed."

"You lie!" screamed Bailey, springing up and starting for the door.

Mystero had him by the collar before he had taken three steps. He was smaller than Bailey, but he spun his man around and slammed him back into his seat with surprising ease.

"Now you sit still and behave!" he admonished the other sternly. "You've been trying to run this show long enough and it's time the rest of us had a say. What have you done with those papers?" he demanded bluntly.

"I never took them! I defy you to prove it!" cried Bailey.

"We'll find them first and prove it afterward," retorted Mystero grimly, as he turned to the manufacturer. "Mr. Wheeler, you know this man better than I, and where, in your mind, would he be likely to conceal those papers?"

Mr. Wheeler thought for a moment. "He is single, has no home here and boards at a regular boarding house in Livermore Street."

"Good!" exclaimed the medium. "The most probable place then is his room! Now, Mr. Wheeler, I suggest that you go to the police station, get an officer and a search warrant and go through his room.

Bailey objected vociferously to this plan, but Mr. Wheeler seemed impressed.

"That is a splendid idea!" he exclaimed. "I will act on it at once!"

Two hours later, Mr. Wheeler and an officer were back in the seance chamber with the papers, which they had found in Bailey's trunk.

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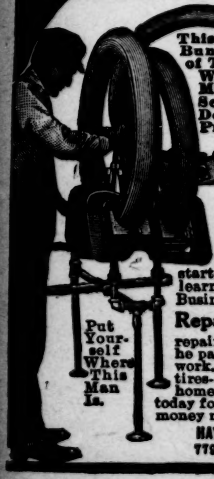

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